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**IT TAKES A VILLAGE – SCHOOLING OUT OF PLACE: EXPERIENCES OF
WATERLOO REGION’S BLACK AFRICAN YOUTH**

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work

In conformity with the requirements

For the Doctor of Philosophy degree in

Wilfrid Laurier University

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Abstract

It Takes a village - Schooling out of Place: Experiences of Waterloo Region's Black African Youth

This dissertation examined experiences of alienation among Black African youth in Waterloo region schools. This study is timely and relevant considering the rapid influx of Black Africans into the region in response to government initiatives to redirect immigrants to smaller communities. The research addressed the dearth of scholarship on experiences of Black Africans outside the major metropolitan areas by employing Afrocentric and critical race theories to explore relationships between race and youth experiences of alienation. The dissertation study utilized elder facilitated youth dialogue forum (adaptation of focus group) and in-depth storytelling (which honours African orality) to access the meanings seventeen youth ascribe to their school experiences. The efficacy of dialogic methods to facilitate deep structural analysis of Black youth's complex ontological realities is a significant methodological contribution of the research.

The study's finding that Black youth make conscious decisions to exit the school system in the interest of their safety, health, and sanity aided the development of the concept of "sanity break" which is a major contribution to the literature. The sanity break concept builds on dropout and pushout notions by illuminating the self-determination in youths' decision to leave school. The concept attempts to re-right hegemonic "writing" of Black African youth which obfuscates the dynamics of their meaning-making, resistance and agency illustrated by taking "sanity breaks" to avoid trauma for their Black bodies, shame to their families or undesirable life outcomes.

The imperative of policy and practice reforms such as hiring Black teachers and integrating African epistemology into the curriculum to keep pace with demographic shifts in the region are highlighted. The dissertation concludes with recommendations to facilitate contextualized responses to the United Nations declaration of the years, 2015 - 2024 as the decade for people of African origin.

Keywords

African, Black youth, education, health, identity, qualitative research, Afrocentric theory, critical race theory, teachers, whiteness, smaller Canadian communities

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In Memory

My grandma, “Iya Alate” my primary caregiver while my parents studied in England

My father, Gabriel Abiola Ayeni, your legacy of education to us your children lives on.

My uncle Dr. T.M. Aluko, you taught me that impossible is nothing, through your Ph.D. late in life, courage in defying stroke-induced paralysis that threatened to abort your writing career, learning to write with your left hand, and writing and publishing till the age of 90.

Sadia Gassim, Therese Kesting, and Steve Baxter, how I wish you’re here for this moment

With Gratitude

My God, my maker, my Abba father, I am your child by grace, undeserved and unearned, just your gift. I am both humbled that I am nothing without you and filled with faith and hope in you.

I thank from my heart the youth and their families who let me into their stories, pain, and joys. You trusted me enough to make me a part of your journeys. Thank you comrades.

How can I thank you, Esther Bamidele Ayeni, my mother, my inspiration, my heroine? The head start you gave me has served me well, God alone can reward you. Ese ma.

To Tunji Oba; Demilade, and Tofarati Oba, I say, family, we achieved the dream! Just knowing, I could not face you all to say, “I gave up” motivated me to plod on.

Thank you to Tosin, Lolu, Tola, Bimbo my siblings by birth, friends by choice for life.

I am indebted to my friends who cared, called, and prayed, so relieved to never have to hear “how far? You know yourselves and God knows you. I can’t wait to start planning those trips. Halima and Clare Fuller, thank you so much for being there to make this a reality.

Importantly, I want to thank my supervisor and teacher, Dr. Shoshana Pollack, thank you for introducing me to Foucault, to Walls to Bridges and for your support through this journey. I would also like to thank my committee members for believing in me. Dr. Uzo Anucha thanks for all the reference letters, Dr. Magnus Mfoafo-M’Carthy, and Dr. Edward Shizha for your intellectual and methodological insights. Thank you all for seeing this through with me

Mamas Jewish, Black, and all; Judith Levine, Benda Halloran, Lauris DaCosta, Judy White Jazzy Narayan, Chloe Callender, Marcia Smellie, Maedith Radlein, Halima Fuller and Martha Kewee-Kumsa, giants on whose shoulders I lean, thanks for always being there. Deena Mandell; the grace, class, and pride with which you wrote references for me stand out. Thanks mamas! To my students who teach me and contribute to my transformation, it truly takes a village, thank you all for being part of my village. God bless, may your tribe increase.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“The scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers, and to our cities....” (Ernest Boyer in [T]he Scholarship of Engagement)

Background of the Study

Findings that Black youth face low educational outcomes, high risk of physical aggression and racism, and are 40 percent more likely to drop out of school than their white peers (Dragnea & Erling, 2008) are concerning. While it is easier to ask what the Black youth are doing wrong, this study sought to understand what is happening to them in the school system. Although higher numbers of Black Africans are entering smaller communities in response to Canadian government’s immigrant redistribution strategies, there is a dearth of scholarship on Africans outside the major metropolitan cities, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver (MTV). Scholarship in small communities has largely focused on employment, health, and women (Sethi, 2014). My dissertation sought to address the gap by examining the nature, extent, and effects of alienation Black youth face in the region’s schools. A major finding and contribution of this study is the development of the concept of “Sanity break” to explain Black youth exit from school. This concept is as powerful as the notion of “pushed out” (Dei, 1995) which challenged hegemonic “dropout” discourses. I argue in this dissertation that Black students do not passively drop out or get pushed out but rather, they make conscious decisions to remove their bodies from the site of oppression – even if only temporarily as they are well aware of the possible consequences of reacting to the racism they face at school. This study therefore serves as a call for action to honour the United Nations decade for the advancement of people of African descent which Canada needs to formally honour and articulate an implementation plan.

Research Question

My overarching purpose was to answer the main research question: “What is the nature of alienation experienced by Black African Youth in Waterloo region schools” and to provide:

- A foundation for future studies about Black African youth in Waterloo Region;
- Opportunities to validate, make visible, and honour the voices of Black African youth;
- A platform for understanding the experiences of other visible minorities in Canada by building on the experiences of Black African youth in Waterloo Region;
- Scholars and practitioners with qualitative research on engaging racialized groups;
- The youth with safe, community-friendly dissemination avenues to make their subjugated knowledge known to demystify Blackness
- Recommendations for policy and practice approaches and strategies

Delimitations of the Study

Given the scope of the study, the sample was limited to Black African youth in Waterloo Region based on self-identification. White Africans are not included in the sample, to enable interrogation of the unique experiences of Black people. The high participation rate in this study shows that it tapped into a need among Black African youth to be affirmed and reflected an ability to respond positively to inviting engagement. The intergenerational nature of this study enabled new perspectives in line with an African egalitarian reciprocal worldview. The format has potential for use in intergroup dialogue to sensitize social workers, teachers, and peers to the lived realities of Black African youth. Afrocentricity challenges the notion that some people are knowledge producers and others are consumers (Asante, 1998). Power produces knowledge (Fanon, 1967; Foucault 1979) and knowledge produces power which is collective as reflected in the African adage, “because we are, I am” in contrast to the notion of “I think, therefore, I am.”

Organization of the Dissertation

The introduction describes the background to the social issue, the purpose, research question, as well as my social location and complex connections to the topic. It provides a general overview of the study.

Chapter two, the theoretical framework and literature review, explores the saliency of critical race theory (CRT) and Afrocentric theory as the fulcrum through which Black African youth school engagement and access to post-secondary education are examined. CRT's potential to make race transparent in the educational research community and Afrocentric theory's ability to centre African ways of knowing enabled synthesizing of a framework for understanding the unique problem of anti-Black racism. The synthesis of both theories produced the integrated critical Afrocentric model which I utilized to reframe racial euphemisms, debates, and discourses of Black African youth education. The relationship between educational achievement and the race of Black youth is not one of simple causality (Providence, 2007 as cited in Dei, 2008). The youth illuminated other relationships such as gender, disabilities, and heteronormativity. As these complex intersections are not adequately explicated by the two main theories, additional frames such as concepts of cultural hegemony and double consciousness espoused by Gramsci and Dubois respectively are deployed to enhance understanding. In particular, the work of Black feminists is helpful in understanding the performance of womanhood (femininity) and masculinity that featured in the youth narratives. Anti-racist scholarship has done a good job of drawing attention to barriers, deficits, and underachievement among Black youth; however, Black youth are not a homogenous group. The additional frames therefore enable analysis and in-depth look exploration of the complex webs within the sub-populations.

Chapter three, the methodology chapter discusses the methods and methodological approaches employed in this dissertation study. In the tradition of applied African methods, I used an intergenerational dialogue forum approach, in-depth life stories. To complete the three-pronged methodological strategy, I integrated African orality and Afrocentric indigenous decolonizing methodology with my reflective journaling. The conversations with the participants were subjective, intersectional, unscripted, and flexible to allow fluidity of roles and ways of knowing against the positivistic ways of coming to know. This methodology holds promise for promoting agency among marginalized populations whose knowledge is often subjugated to hegemonic discourses.

Chapter four, the findings chapter details the insights gleaned from listening to the voices of the youth and the community elders were involved in the research. Each approach enabled me to access information and experiences that might not otherwise have been illuminated. Being in the presence of peers through the dialogue forum enabled youth to jolt each other's recall and be awakened to experiences they may overlook, while the individual stories, devoid of intrusions, facilitated in-depth accounts of the lives of six of the youth participants.

Chapter five, the discussion chapter analyzes the nuanced information presented by participants against the backdrop of history, context, and theory. The dialogic methods uniquely enable marginalized populations to resist internalized oppressions and engage in more structural analysis of their experiences. African philosophies abound, albeit not always in written form and I learn on African thinkers in propounding theories about relationships between the Black African youth experiences and the whiteness and Eurocentricity of the persons, curriculum, and institutions entrusted with their education. I theorize that Black youth leaving school is an informed decision taken by Black youth for their health and sanity as they are aware of the

racism and alienation they face as well as the consequences of reacting to the injustice of their circumstances. This demonstrates the linkages between varied forms of resistance adopted by the youth and their meaning-making processes. In addition, the youth eloquently illustrate the role of parents family, faith and community supports to inspire faith, hope, empathy, self -esteem, agency, leadership, and service.

Chapter six is my reflection on the experience of being an insider on the outside both within the academy and in my own community. My embodied presence as a sister-academic haunted by the gravity of the social problems navigated the colonized research terrains with the same double consciousness as the youth, I sought to engage. Stuck and unable to continue with the motions of a doctoral degree, I realized my metaphorical research stool was missing a third leg – action. I took a detour, creating a social innovation laboratory and bringing together my insider-outsider selves and invigorated the passion that galvanized me into doctoral studies.

Chapter seven evaluates how the study answered the study’s main research question. I discuss the implications of the research for social workers and policy makers and highlight the dissertation’s contributions to the body of knowledge, building on extant literature. I also looked forward to further large-scale studies that extend the methodological strategies of this dissertation to examine the unique experience of Black African populations in Waterloo and across Canada. Ongoing knowledge translation and benefits of the study to the community are also highlighted.

Chapter eight charges the Black community to adopt a pro- African decolonizing stance that does more than deconstruct or counter Whiteness but demands action in the decade that rightfully demands and is devoted to the advancement of African persons.

Terminology

To promote shared understanding about issues examined in the research study, key terms and terminology utilized are hereby defined before proceeding with the main tasks of the paper.

The term *Black African Youth* refers to Black youth of African origin living in Canada whether they immigrated to or were born in Canada. It was used interchangeably with Black Canadian, Africa-Caribbean- Canadians, Blacks, and Canadian Blacks in this paper although I acknowledge there are differences among groups that constitute this broad category. I also recognize that their differences notwithstanding, these groups share African roots, concerns, and experiences as Blacks in Canada (James, Este, Thomas, Bernard, Benjamin, Lloyd, & Turner, 2010; Walcott, 2003).

The term *youth* is defined not as a category beginning at a given age and culminating in a specific age of adulthood because there is no universal definition as youth is rather ambiguous and broad. Statistics Canada defines youth as 16-28 years, whereas for Human Resources and Skills Development Canada it is 15-24. For this study, I adopted age 16 to 24, but also recognize that many youth effects or attributes seen in youth may begin early and or transcend narrow brackets (Review of roots of violence, 2008; Government of Canada, 2017)

Visible minority is defined as "persons, other than Aboriginal (*indigenous*) peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in color" and consists mainly of the following: Chinese, South Asian, Black, Arab, West Asian, Filipino, Southeast Asian, Latin American, Japanese, and Korean (Statistics Canada, 2012). This term is not to be equated with minor or minority as that would infantilize non-whites, but as widely used in the literature, it distinguishes between the mainstream or dominant group and those considered visible minority groups.

The term *racialized* is used to describe groups who experience racism, defined by the Webster Dictionary (Webster, 2003) as a belief in the existence of inherent differences among human races which are thought to determine cultural or individual achievement. Racism involves the idea that one race is superior and has the right to rule others. I use racialized not as a negative term but rather as a call to duty (Dei, 2010) i.e., disrupting and resisting hegemonic politics of equality, and diversity that obscure and perpetuate racism.

Afrocentric education is defined for this paper as education that affirms African epistemology. These include indigenous knowledge systems, African culture, Black history, art, dance, music, ceremonies, resources, and other decolonizing pedagogy. I distinguish it from *Afrocentric schooling* as it is not bound by geography, but rather African-centered, context focused rather than site of education. It can be facilitated in all schools by educators, parents and others committed to African culture and history (Asante, 2003; Dei, 1995; Ladson –Billings, 1995) to avoid epistemicide which is the systemic destruction of the knowledge of “the other.”

Social Location

Like many newcomers to Canada, my family faced settlement, credentialing, precarious employment, and wellbeing challenges (Kumsa et al., 2014; Sethi, 2014). Worst of all, the school attempted to stream our children into the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. We resisted the racial profiling as it was based on nationality, rather than an administered test that would have demonstrated their proficiency in English which was in fact their first language. Africa is regarded as the Dark Continent with no knowledge of value (Fanon, 1967) so while other newcomers, are framed as model immigrants, Blacks are the other. Our encounters with the school systems made us begin to rethink the validity of media portrayals of Black youth as dropouts, gang members, and criminals. Tatum (1997) challenged the framing of Black youth as

the problem who just chose to self-segregate. Based on her travels across America, she asserted that racism is pervasive, arguing that the relevant question is not “Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria”, but rather - what is being done to Black youth at school? Dlamini (2015) also highlighted stigmas and social constructions that represent Black youth ambiguously and negatively.

In my child welfare career, I observed a disproportionately high rate of referral of Black pupils and families by schools and realized it was symptomatic of race realities in the region. The Black Lives Matter Movement was evolving and simultaneously, the United Nations declared 2015 to 2024 as the decade for people of African origin. The researcher’s social location influences the, who, what, where, and how of research (Ellis, 1995; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and my emic connections to these issues motivated me to explore what is happening to Black youth in the schools as the focus of my doctoral studies, to contribute to re-writing and re-righting Black African youth stories (Absolon, 2010) through my dissertation.

Chapter 2: Conceptual framework, critical discourses, and literature review

African Immigration to Waterloo Region

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) reforms of 2002 and 2008 relaxed previous racially defined immigration restrictions and Canada became one of the most multicultural countries in the world. From 2001 to 2006, the immigrant population grew by 13.5%, almost double the growth in Canada's non-immigrant population, and from Statistics Canada projections, by 2017 close to one in four Canadians will be visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2008). The Canadian government's focus on redistributing immigrants around the country (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2011) led to more non-European immigrants settling into smaller communities such as the Waterloo Region.

The proportion of Africans in the region grew from 0.5 percent in 1991 to 5.5 percent in 2006 and between 2006 and 2011 that proportion had more than doubled, going from 5.5 percent to 12 percent an increase of over 100 percent in five years, the largest growth of any population group in the region. Apart from the group classified as Asian and the Middle East, other groups either had little or no growth while some experienced declining numbers. The Region's total population increased by 9 percent between 2001 and 2006, an increase which in absolute terms exceeded that of Toronto, Ottawa, and Hamilton, surpassing provincial and national rates (Statistics Canada, 2008).

By 2015 the total immigrant population was just over 110, 000, but while Europe contributed 48.5% of the total population, Europeans constituted only 17.1 percent of the recent immigrant population. On the other hand, while Africa accounted for 5.5 percent of immigrant population, it contributed 12 percent of newcomer immigrants, many of whom are attracted to the region by its educational institutions which are considered welcoming (Walton-Roberts,

2011). Relative growth in the number of immigrants from Africa far outstrips that of any other group; however, little is known about their experiences in the Region. My study attempted to address the gap by engaging and listening to Black African youth. Limited research in Canada's larger cities points to high school dropout and incarceration rates (Ontario Association of Black educators, 2017, Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2012), negative media images (Wortley, 2002), barriers as well as disproportionately negative outcomes (Anucha, 2017). Preventive education measures have been recommended but Stephen Lewis' widely quoted statement in his 1992 report for the then Ontario Premier Bob Rae remains as pertinent today as it was then.

First, what we are dealing with, at root, and fundamentally, is anti-Black racism. While it is obviously true that every visible minority community experiences the indignities and wounds of systemic discrimination throughout Southern Ontario, It is the Black community which is the focus. It is Blacks who are being shot, it is Black youth that is unemployed in excessive numbers, it is Black students who are being inappropriately streamed in schools, it is Black kids who are disproportionately dropping out, it is housing communities with large concentrations of Black residents where the sense of vulnerability and disadvantage is most acute, it is Black employees... on whom the doors of upward equity slam shut. Just as the soothing balm of "multiculturalism" cannot mask racism, so racism cannot mask its primary target (p. 2)

The initiatives created demographic shifts (McFadden and Jansen, 2007 as cited in Walton-Roberts, 2017) and, in Waterloo region, the proportion of Africans grew from 0.5 % in 1991 to 8.5% in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2008). This higher inflow of Africans, in addition to the existence of early Black settlers from the Caribbean islands who have had a long history of settlement in the region resulted in a significant population of Blacks in Waterloo Region. An obvious implication of this demographic profile is that like bigger Canadian cities, smaller communities must learn to address implications of increased diversity, particularly the racially visible and unmistakable difference. While the major goal of the provinces and cities is their community's growth, attracting and seeking to retain immigrants from non-traditional sources is

not automatic but rather challenges professed openness and adaptability of ill-equipped host communities. The challenges include integrating, engaging, and ensuring access to education, basic human rights, and equitable opportunities for increased Black population in communities that had been White dominated. Scholarship on immigration in Waterloo Region have hitherto focused on employment (McFadden & Jansen, 2007), health of immigrant women (Sethi, 2014), economic growth and the welcoming role of universities (Walton-Roberts, 2011).

Canada is a multicultural society that embraces cultural diversity and the purpose of education in any society is to prepare citizens to live in that context (Asante, 1991). It would, therefore, be expected that a multicultural society like Canada would value plural epistemologies in its public-school system and the multiplicity of cultures represented in the schools and the country. To further its objective of stimulating growth in under-populated regions, the government liberalized its immigration laws, embracing immigration from places such as Africa. This push for population and economic growth in small to medium cities (CIC, 2011) has led to high numbers of immigrants from non-European sources in largely white western communities.

The introduction of the Provincial and Territorial Nominee program was designed to attract and retain immigrants in small- and medium-sized communities (Krah, Derwing, & Abu Laban, 2005). The then Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism, Jason Kenney announced in 2005 “our government recognizes the importance of nominee programs in spreading out the benefits of immigration across the country” (CIC, 2005, Para. 3). Against this backdrop, this study is timely, relevant, and important as more Black Africans continue to settle outside the large metropolitan areas. It has significance for the youth, their families, and the larger society as integrating the youth into the society is a social justice issue and benefits the country by ensuring they become productive adults able to contribute and give back to their new country.

Education is important, but among Black African youth, the dropout rate is high and access to post-secondary education is low so there is a need to consider how the modes of education alienates or disengages Black Canadian youth. Limited research in Canada's larger cities points to high school dropout and incarceration rates negative media images (Anucha, 2013; Rankin & Winsa, The Star.com, March 1, 2013; Wortley, 2002). Black youth of African origin face opportunity gaps and hindrances to successful educational and civic engagement, (Dlamini, 2015), they are more likely to experience poverty (Colour of Poverty, 2008), be unemployed (Block & Galabuzi, 2011:10), and be both victims and perpetrators of crime and therefore involved in the criminal justice system at high levels (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2012). They are also at high risk of being marginalized or excluded (Dei & Rummens, 2014) and stereotyped as criminal, lazy, and dumb (Wortley, 2002). These realities dire realities were not lost on Stephen Lewis (1992) as reflected in his widely quoted Race Relations Report for the then Ontario Premier Bob Rae referred to earlier. He identified not just racism but anti-Black racism as a fundamental problem and the platform for better responses to minorities in general.

Other subsequent reports echo Lewis' observation and recommend better educational engagement of Black youth as a fundamental human right and a measure to address educational disparity, prevent community crime, and ensure all youth maximize their full potential (Roots of Violence Report, 2008). As de Broucker (2005) rightly notes: "Widespread participation of people of all socio-economic backgrounds in post-secondary education can reduce economic disparities and promote social cohesion" (p. 2). Given the association between post-secondary education (PSE) and political, economic, and social inclusion (Bawa & Munck, 2012), it is concerning that black youth in Canada "drop out" or are "pushed out" (Dei, Holmes, Mazzuca, McIsaac & Campbell, 1997) of school at disproportionately high rates. If access to post-

secondary education rather than empty rhetoric promotes social cohesion, then it is important to improve access to PSE among Black youth. The zero-tolerance policy of the early 2000s met with failure in the United States as “anxious educators ... relied increasingly on zero tolerance policy as a simple draconian, response to student threats of violence that relieved them of the need to exercise judgment and make reasoned decisions in response to student infraction” (Sciba & Peterson 1999, Para. 1). In Canada also, the policy was detrimental to visible minority students and those with disabilities (Daniel & Bondy, 2008). Youth who were considered different received harsh judgments as exclusionary policies resulted in increased school dropout and crime (Wright et al., 2006). Lower levels of educational attainment and access to PSE are acknowledged to have civic, political, social, and economic consequences (Bawa & Munck, 2012), but Black youth continue to be less likely to do well at school (Block & Galabuzi, 2011:10; Dei, 1985). This trend was interrogated in a paper I co-authored with fellow African Canadian scholars as our professional and personal experiences mirrored those of Black African youth we all work with (Kumsa, Mfoafo-M'Carthy, Oba, & Gassim, 2014).

To understand existing bodies of knowledge on issues pertinent to my study, I explored critical discourses of Blackness, critical race theories, and Afrocentric theoretical frameworks as well as literature on alternative schooling, Afrocentric schools, culturally relevant education, Black learners, and indigenous African epistemology. Relevant debates, perspectives, and conceptualizations were analyzed, and the study was informed by Afrocentric scholars who explicate the experiences and promote meaningful engagement of Black African youth. I conducted a critical discursive analysis of literature on the experiences faced by Black youth in the school context and employed Afrocentric postulations that illuminate subjugated knowledge about their encounters within the educational terrains.

Theoretical Framework

The dissertation is informed by critical race theory (CRT) and Afrocentric theory, both of which enable me to pursue two post-modern goals: the deconstruction of hegemonic discourses and political consciousness-raising. My goal was to examine risk-focused educational practices using Afrocentric and CRT perspectives to move beyond the “anti” in anti-racism to epistemological plurality and cultural validation. Disengagement of Black children as evidenced by the 40% dropout rate is grave and if white children were leaving the school system at similar rates, it would be considered an epidemic. The problem would hardly be left to the devices of isolated separate school experiments that hardly impact general attitudes or publicly funded education systems. That the plight of Black youth is continually ignored as documented in the literature (Dei, 1995, 2000, 2008; James et al., 2010) validates Lewis’ (1992) assertion that “just as the soothing balm of ‘multiculturalism’ cannot mask racism, so racism cannot mask its primary target” (p.2). The yawning gap in scholarship, policy, and practice obscures the lived experiences of Black youth. Focus on Black youth violence, criminality, and underachievement or the merits and demerits of Afrocentric schools sidetracks from the problem of a universalizing Eurocentric education that disenfranchises Black youth. Eurocentric schools use power to punish, regulate, and subdue “the other” (Foucault, 1994), breed inequity, create resistance (Giroux, 2003), and adversely impact Black youth (Dei, 2008; Kewee-Kumsa, 2013; Walcott, 2003). Because the impacts are obfuscated by hegemonic discourse, this paper employs CRT and Afrocentric lenses to illuminate the issues. However, as will be seen in the findings chapter, these theories are not without limitations with regards to their ability to render experiences of other subject positions and issues such as gender performativity, disability and heteronormativity which were illustrated by the youth participants in this dissertation study.

In this section, I examine in more critical depth, the two theoretical approaches considered salient for examining the issues of marginalized African youth: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Afrocentric Theory which I synthesized into an integrated critical Afrocentric research philosophy. First, I briefly outline the main tenets of critical race theory and discuss its salience for addressing issues related to Black youth schooling. I then move on to discuss the elements of Afrocentric theory and its applications to theorizing Black African youth schooling. The two theories enable me to 1) apply CRT to interrupt hegemonic discourses of race, particularly of Black youth educational engagement, and critique existing educational structures; 2) center African ways of thinking, knowing, and being; and 3) develop a model to conceptualize curricular, societal, legislative, pedagogical and other changes needed through reconstruction and renaming of concepts, discourses, and debates about Black youth.

Critical race theory

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged from the field of critical legal studies in the early 1970s in the United States of America (Delgado, 1995; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993) to address concerns about the slow and incremental pace of racial reforms in the post-civil rights era (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw 1993; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2001). It was argued that Critical Legal Studies could not challenge racial injustice or advance societal transformation because it ignored lived experiences of racialized people (Delgado, 1995; Ladson Billings, 1988, 1998). Scholars of colour therefore developed CRT to make more visible the subtle forms of racism that impact Black people. CRT is primarily a critical theory which means it has as its aim, emancipation, and liberation from oppressive structures. This focus makes it particularly meaningful for the discourse on Black youth schooling and their access to post-

secondary education. It is constructivist in nature, emphasizing social construction of race as used to covertly and overtly regulate and structure allocation of social rights. Constructing one race as inferior to another creates a system of racial hierarchy, not based on scientific fact but on white supremacist thought as seen in the profiling of Black pupils as incapable. CRT seeks enlightenment not just for its own sake but to change society by empowering people to surmount the enslavements of society's racialized systems. CRT raises consciousness about oppression and promotes critical reflection about and desire to change hegemonic discourses (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1993; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2001). Critical race theorists privilege non-essentialist thinking about race and the critical lens facilitates recognizing flawed discourses such as colour blindness which purports that race is not important (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Haney-Lopez, 2010). This makes it a relevant approach for understanding and validating Black youth lived experiences.

Such validation is important because notions of who can know and who are merely consumers of knowledge occur in a complex interplay of power (Foucault, 1982, 2003a, 2003b). Dominant discourses that assign intellect to white people and inferiority to Black people are presented as "the truth." Such "truths" serve the purpose of sustaining domination and oppression but CRT challenges received authority and suggestions that Black people are not acceptable knowers (Ahmed, 2009). Black people have cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) which is invalidated through historical degradation, slavery, apartheid, and global inequalities. CRT enables an understanding of how lived realities of Black youth are ignored and informs the need to interrogate notions of meritocracy by interdicting the power that undergirds racism. The CRT lens illuminates how institutional and structural racism makes Canada's promises of freedoms and rights unattainable for many Black people (Dei, 2005; Giroux, 2003; James, 2010; Walcott,

2003). Schools transmit ahistorical accounts of race which they depict as benign and innocuous by failing to link racism with social injustice and inequity. Dei (2008) reminds us that “the stigmatization of students arising from their differential treatment by race ... and the disciplining of Black bodies ... cannot be underestimated (p.350). There seems to be a belief that if anything is good, it must be White, ignoring the appropriation of African wealth, knowledge and resources and rendering anything not claimed by Whites, deficient. While other groups are considered high performing, Blacks who are intellectual are thought to be merely acting white and not authentic (Ogbu, 1992) because Black has become a code for low intellect.

Critical race theory goes beyond describing racial linkages that represent critical areas of concern and enable critical evaluation of the impact of the intersecting relationships. Such links include how race combines with gender and other factors to exclude Black youth from schools, denying them access to post-secondary education. Critical race theories promote understanding about complex, constituted identities and ways in which race, gender, and class place constraints on Black lives as CRT scholars contextualize multiple overlapping oppressions, emphasizing that people are not just one thing but a composite of varied identities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Crenshaw (1991) developed intersectionality theory to illuminate how racialized, gendered, classed, and sexualized oppressions intersect in human lives. Critical race theorists recognize that race, class, and gender do not act in isolation, but their theorization of intersectionality identifies race as a primary organizing principle in intergroup relations.

A simplistic view of intersectionality treats various factors as lanes of oppression which renders the analysis devoid of the racial conundrum which CRT theorists emphasize. I opine that neither a hierarchy of oppression or equating different forms of oppression adequately addresses complexities and uniqueness of their intersections in the lives of racialized people. Oppressions

are seldom attributive, but even if they were, would “two oppressions” be greater than one regardless of context? Such a computation presupposes that weight or values can be tangibly assigned to oppressions as singular strands, but simplistic conceptualizations do not account for the preponderance of multiple oppressions in the lives of certain groups and complex interactions among webs of oppression. It also does not explain why certain groups experience oppressions unknown to others. Converging on certain target groups and individuals, its occurrence is not coincidental, but the basis is ignored by others. Crenshaw (2014) describes it as collective forgetting and Pun (2009) also warns about the ontology of forgetting. Black women continue to experience oppression based on both race and gender or either of the two at different life nodes. Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1993) and matrix of oppressions (Collins, 1990) do enable recognition of the need to interrogate multiple factors in seeking to understand the complex phenomena faced by racialized people. While there are, no doubt, Black people who experience both privilege and oppression, it is undesirable to construct a hierarchy of oppression or trauma which denounces the role of certain elements. It must be noted that any factor could be supreme at any time although race appears to be a constant unmistakeable element retaining impact even when class, status, and other factors change. This primacy of race (Gillborn, 2015) presents a dilemma when issues are framed as race versus gender. The gender war continues to be fought with significant gains as more women occupy positions in boardrooms and politics. However, the benefits are not equally spread as coloured women continue to face higher levels of raced and gendered oppression interwoven with poverty or lower socio-economic status (Enang, J. 2001)

If theories enable prediction, CRT aids in theorizing the complex, specific, and targeted oppressions Black youth face. Like intersection theory, critical race theorists recognize people do not choose when to be Black or male or female or live out separate parts of their identity.

People are situated at multiple axes of oppression and privilege at any one-time which shifts based on context and location. Oppression and privilege are interconnected in a web, not interlocking, as that would pre-suppose constituent parts can be unlocked but the interwoven connectedness of oppression upon marginalized people is more complex. Through history, the oppressed were blamed for their subjugation which was based on beliefs about inherent deficiency in the oppressed. Objectifying the victimized and seeing them as subhuman, alleviated guilt and dominant discourses were permission-giving strategies that enabled harsh treatment and punishment to be deemed warranted and inevitable. CRT recognizes the oppression Black people face historically and currently, making race salient, without ignoring other factors such as dis-ability, gender, sex, class, religion, and others.

“Alagbara ma mero, baba ole” - The one who acts without thinking is the chief of sluggards.” - A Nigerian Proverb, also found in other African countries

CRT looks at the whole being without objectifying or defining the racialized by Eurocentric conceptualizations. The Nigerian proverb quoted above suggests a connection of mind and body, a balance between physical strength and mental agility. It deviates from the view of Blacks as brutes as the proverb highlights the value Blacks place on discipline to strategize, plan, and act, all which CRT combines in its practical intent and applications because “critical theory without a practical intent would be bankrupt on its own terms” (Leonard, 1990, p.3) cited in Mullaly (2010). CRT is also political, rooted in a desire for change and focused on subtle and discursive racism that hinders radical social transformation (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1993; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2001). It challenges post-racial discourse which assumes that while race may have once affected racialized people, its effects have ceased to exist. In my experience

working with youth under the zero-tolerance policy, the legislation was a phrase that legitimized exclusion of those considered unable to fit in. Ideas of “the norm” reflect deeply ingrained subconscious Eurocentric mores and ways that influence school personnel’s labelling of difference as deficient, abnormal, and rebellious (Dei, 1997). “Normalization of ... race-based practices in ... education makes the racism that fuels it look ordinary to such a degree that oppression no longer seems like oppression to the perpetrators” (Taylor, 1998, p.123). That is why Black pupils could be judged as unable to fit in and therefore in need of reformation as skin colour is activated as an unconscious measure of difference and inferiority and therefore a means to marginalize the other. Racism is prevalent but subtle and for youth, the primary site of racism is at school (Kubilene, Chung Yan, Kewee-Kumsa, & Burman, 2014). CRT’s ability to name subtle racism such as entrenched beliefs and attitudes in post-civil rights era underscores its relevance for interrogating subtle forms of racism in the school system (Kubilene et al., 2014).

By emphasizing knowledge plurality and making both historical and ongoing racial acts transparent, CRT is useful for exploring Black youth’s school experiences. Critical race theorists interrogate the very nature of space and embodied encounters (Ahmed, 2000). Therefore, CRT is an important tool in the field of education to examine issues such as school punishment or discipline, curriculum development, power, privilege, and hierarchy. It can provide alternative perspectives on assessments, racially skewed IQ testing, and stereotypes about Black youth under-achievement. “Bourdieu’s insight on how a hierarchical society reproduces itself can explain why academic and social outcomes of people of color are lower than those of Whites” (Yosso, 2006, p. 70). Critical race theorist Ladson-Billings (1995) concept of “culturally relevant pedagogy” came from finding that American teachers, rated “exceptional” by parents, administrators, and the community, showed the traditional approach was more about reforming

“the other” than challenging systemic assumptions. Superficial reforms unwittingly demand “the other” must become subdued to belong which means the liberation goals of education are jettisoned as students deemed unacceptable because of their race/ethnicity, language, or social class are made to fit into a hierarchical structure that is defined as a meritocracy even though they merely reproduce miscarriage of justice and the desecration of their basic human rights (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Afrocentric theory

Ka rin ka po lo ye eni: I am because we are, I am honoured when we are many, or people are my wrappers – Variants of this concept can be found in virtually all African countries

Afrocentric theory deconstructs myths and challenges insistence on White superiority and monopoly of knowledge (Asante, 1990). The idea that we are better together is rooted in African culture. The version of the above proverb common among the Yoruba people of West Africa goes thus – “Eni kan o ki nje awa de” which transliterated means one person cannot say “we are here”. An individual is not superior to the collective; there is wisdom and knowledge in all. Molefi Asante of Ugandan and Nigerian ancestry is a prolific scholar of the African world and founder of the first Ph.D. program in African American Studies. He is acknowledged as transforming Afrocentric ideas into a formal theory in 1980, but he built on ideas compiled by foremost American sociologist and Editor W.E.B. Dubois between 1886 and 1903 from historians, civil rights activists, and Pan-Africanist authors such as Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Leopold Senghor, and Obafemi Awolowo. Afrocentric theory centers, locates and contextualizes the collective experiences of African people historically, economically, philosophically, spiritually, and socially. Asante himself learned from experiencing Africa and recalls that while travelling in Africa he realized “it was ‘crazy’ for a Black man to have a

European name” (Asante, 2003, p. 716). He subsequently wrote the book “*As I Run Toward Africa*”. In this dissertation, combining CRT with Afrocentric theory enables a return to Africa for an ideological, culturally validating lens to make meaning of Black African youth experiences.

Afrocentric theory views world events and history with Africans as key players and in the center. It places “Africans and the interests of Africa at the center of ... Problem-solving” (Asante, 1987, p.198). The theory contends Africans can know and be known (Dei, 2008). Afrocentricity is a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate. It is the placing of African people in the center of any analysis of African phenomena.... a devotion to the idea that what is in the best interest of African consciousness is at the heart of ethical behavior (Asante, 2003, p.2).

Afrocentrism has a place in mainstream education because it offers an alternative premise for non-white student’s learning and especially Black youth. Afrocentric ideology and Pan-African knowledge can offer Black youth a place to run to for safety from the dominant gaze and enables them (like Asante) to make meaning of the past and understand the present (Dei, 2007; Asante, 1991; Du Bois, 1973). Asante (2003) opined that education fundamentally socializes children to become part of the group that educates them, so schools reflect the societies that develop them. He argued that white education cannot meet the needs of non-white children and argued that effective learning comes from placing student’s culture at the center of their learning (Asante, 1971).

The following key defining features of Afrocentric theory in relation to education and research ideas as applied to Black youth derive from the work of leading Afrocentric educator,

George Dei. He condensed ideas from Afrocentric and Pan-African paradigms under the themes adapted and amplified in this section through the addition of my own ideas.

Interconnectivity - In contrast to Eurocentric individuality, Afrocentricity emphasizes collectivity, which “translates into the collective being responsible for individuals” (Este and Bernard, 2003:321, as cited in James et al., p. 23) and individual accountability to the community. Knowledge is not for personal consumption but rooted in, motivated by, and having utility for the community (Dei, 2011). The saying “I am because we are”, “eating together makes one full” or “it takes a village to raise a child” reflect collective responsibility and interdependence.

No bystanders - Social workers decry by standing as contributing to oppression and injustice and Dei (2011) describes basic African indigenous knowledge thus:

Knowledge compels action, in traditional times, it was imperative for survival. Those who knew told others, what plants were poisonous and what was good for food. Knowing was not separated from doing for the common good. In the era of institutionalization, it must still be recognized that policies are made for humans, not vice versa. They must “be grounded in the needs of the community/community work and action” (Dei, 2011p.7) and recognize that all can know (Asante, 2003; Dei, 2000, 2010, 2011; Akbar 1998/1999) because according to the African proverb “*it is by listening to the stories of all the people that the king is considered wise.*” In other words, the king’s wisdom derives from listening, hearing, and applying the collective wisdom of the people to problem-solving and conflict resolution. African ideological frames are egalitarian, do not assign people to superior or inferior groups but value the contributions of all. There is a proverb that says; the child of a slave may become a king tomorrow, emphasizing the transience of wealth and status and the need to treat everyone well because every human being

has worth. Elders are not considered unproductive but are revered for their wisdom. Children also possess remarkable insights, perspectives, and abilities as this proverb teaches. “*The hands of a child cannot reach the shelf, but the elder’s hand can’t enter the gourd*”, elders need youth and they, in turn, youth need elders and “*it is by the fingers working together that hands get clean*”. These ideologies are contrary to the mainstream ethos and the feeling that absenting African ways of being was harming African children and robbing them of insights into their identity and purpose led to advocacy efforts and agitations for reforms in the school system (Dei, 2011). African guiding frameworks suggest that wisdom begins in the community and that “to know is to act” for the community because “*It is only because we are, that I am or can be*”.

Culture and identity – African epistemology or Pan-Africanism is decolonizing and liberating because it is indigenous, thus helping Africans to rediscover and re-present that which was truncated with the advent of colonialism (Dei, 1996). Afrocentricity recognizes the validity and authenticity of African culture but cannot resort to essentialization because there are equally valid and varied manifestations of African culture and identity. Each African group must reconnect with their culture and with Africa. Authenticity is conceptualized not in terms of speaking behalf of all Africans but re-humanizing the master script away from White Eurocentric misrepresentation, but recognizing Blackness as absented, but visible, forgotten, yet evolving as noted by Walcott (2003).

In a Canadian context, writing Blackness is a scary scenario; we are an absented presence always under pressure of erasure.... I mean to signal blackness as a sign, one that carries with it histories of resistance and domination. But Blackness is also a sign which is never closed and always under contestations ... questions of blackness far exceed the categories of the biological and ethnic. I deploy blackness as a discourse ... embedded in a history or a set of histories which are messy and contested ... always in progress, always in the process of becoming (p.26).

Belief in the spiritual nature of human beings - Africans are not alone in having values of spirituality and Afrocentrism is not a mythical exotic practice. It does not suggest a return to ancestral worship or denouncing so-called western beliefs because, although Whites claim Jesus and Christianity, he was not White. Portrayals of a white Jesus arise from the flawed thinking that anything good must be white. However, Africans commonly believe that spirituality is as legitimate and valid as material elements, thereby affirming wholistic knowing, including spiritual, affective, intuitive, and emotional knowledge (Dei, 2011). The Afrocentric tenet of collectivity and spirituality are aligned as Africans traditionally lived not for the individual self but for a higher purpose. Spiritual knowing and knowledge have ethical implications, implying the connection of all to the maker and therefore to each other and this belief informed the use of restorative justice systems that valued poor and rich, offenders and offended in traditional African societies. This does not mean Afrocentrism embraces essentialist notions of African religion, but rather recognizes that humans live in bodies but have spirits and souls and all three are integral to the whole.

Focusing on the African race could be interpreted as essentialist but Stuart Hall (1988) reminds us that “we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, without being contained by that position” (p. 442). The idea that a focus on the Black race is against social justice reveals a negative view of race (Dei, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and attempts to mask the dominance Eurocentrism ascribes to itself. Such ideas must, therefore, be resisted because “when we lose the right to be different, we lose the right to be free” (Mandela quotes, n.d.). The social power in delineating difference need not be the power of domination; it can instead be the source of empowerment and reconstruction (Ladson Billings, 1995, p. 1242). If in seeing Blackness people saw wisdom and positive cultural

heritage, they would not feel the need to deny race or adopt colour blindness as code for their deficit view of blackness but would rather acknowledge and value Blackness.

Afrocentrism sees race not as a negative but as a means of enabling Black people to develop creative self-hood and political consciousness. It is based on locating domination and honoring African ways of thinking, feeling, and being (Dei, 1997, 2000). It recognizes that the world's problems affect different populations in unique ways (Tilliotson & McDougall, 2013). It, therefore, reclaims racialization and renames what it means to be Black and centers the African origins as honorable rather than stigmatized which is important for Black youth in the throes of identity formation as “[S]elf-awareness and group consciousness provide identity affirmation and, reinforcement for youth” (Dei, 2008, p. 352). Validating non-Eurocentric conceptualizations and interpretations is important to enable Black youth to develop in healthy, redeeming ways. Race denial means unique experiences of Black youth are unseen even though multiculturalism policies exist. “The danger lies in attempting to deal with oppression purely from a theoretical base, without an emotional, heartfelt grappling with the source ..., without naming the enemy within us and outside of us, no authentic, non-hierarchical connection can take place (Cherrie Marage as cited in Yosso, 2005 p. 73).

Integrative Critical Afrocentric Theoretical Framework

Integrating both critical race theory and Afrocentric theory enabled me to develop an integrated critical, Afrocentric theoretical framework model. Integrating the criticality of CRT with the African centeredness of Afrocentric theory informs new ways of thinking about complex multifaceted phenomena. This model honours voices of Black lived experience in developing answers to issues of concern to Africans. The place of and potential of Afrocentric knowledge to unearth subjugated knowledge drives and informs this model. Critique and de-

centering of hegemonic discourses, which this model enables, creates spaces for oppressed groups to express knowledge” gained from the experience of being oppressed. They can then turn such insight into strategies for change (Collins, 1998). Similarly, Asante (2003) and Dei (2008) focus on reorienting what has been described as slave thinking into a positive, proactive, productive centeredness for Black people all over the world.

I use this integrated model to analyze the power of language in racial euphemisms such as cultural competency, dropout, underachievement, success, resistance, and resilience because the critical Afrocentric model combines the twin tasks of reflection on and action (Frere, 2000). It emphasizes decolonized thinking to articulate and restore truncated African realities or the disrupted African project (Dei, 2008). Black youth may face multi-axial oppressions, but maintaining particularities and centrality of race through a model that interrogates and centers their experiences is very relevant and salient. It enables movement from disenfranchisement and becoming change agents in their own lives, the school, and the larger society. The pathways to disenfranchisement involved colonization, devaluation, and the imposition of Eurocentric ideology as both universal and superior. My critical Afrocentric model combined critical race theory and Afrocentric theory to promote alternative pathways for Black youth in political consciousness and awareness of Black African knowledge and history. Giving youth an authentic foundation for selfhood (collective and individual) includes the vocabulary and ideology for decoding exnomination and resisting Eurocentric flawed assumption. Critical awakening can develop empowered change agents who critically interpret racial euphemisms through the filter of an Afrocentric, Pan African, or African lens. Even though euphemisms are often devoid of reality, Dei (2008) contends that “perceptions have powerful consequences” (p. 350). Covert racial dynamics and subterfuges rely on the power of illusion to impact the lives of real people,

but they are not based. bell hooks (1994) reminds us to be conscious and aware of how schools deploy over-actualized knowledge, to control and regulate “the other.”

It is important that young Black people gain this awareness and have the tools and concepts to resist domination and suppression of their knowledge, identity and lived experiences. In the following section, I use integrated critical Afrocentric theory to situate key discourses and conceptualizations such as cultural competency, multiculturalism, underachievement, success, and resistance, as well as debates over segregation versus integration or push-out versus dropout in the integrative critical Afrocentric model.

Euphemisms and Debates

Notions of cultural competency - In theorizing the notion of cultural competency, I explore how essentialist fascination with “the other” keeps them in a place of otherness. Pun (2009) equated cultural competency with new racism because of its focus on othering. The desire to be the expert in the life of “the other” can lead to formulaic profiles, prescriptions, and interventions that reinforce power, oppression, and hierarchy of knowledge, rooted in modernism and absolutism. On one hand, cultural competency ignores the history of colonialism, dominance, and whiteness without being explicit about race. On the other hand, critical race theorist, Ladson Billings (1995) constructs cultural competence as a positive trait of teachers who were successful in teaching African children (Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, the tendency of helping professionals to appropriate cultural competency as mastery of the other under a façade of benevolence makes the term problematic. Cultural competence is not located in the teacher, social worker, media, or police, culture is not static; ethnic groups are not homogenous, and people’s varied journeys inform their meaning-making schema.

Pun (2009) shows the problematic in social workers using cultural competency to profile people and thereby seeking evidence to fit a socially constructed hypothesis that depoliticizes what is inherently political. By upholding but not examining “Canadian culture,” social workers maintain a discourse of Canadian culture as whiteness, absenting Blacks from history books, the media, and schools. The best of scholars fall prey to the dominance of the social construction of whiteness because it is presented as the common-sense stock of knowledge, but what is common sense is not universal. It is not just that culture is too complex to be mastered, but ordering and ranking people within hierarchies that one culture creates about itself is the very definition of racism. “Culturally competent” teachers or social workers “objectifying and fixing cultural differences by bringing to bear Western-centered assumptions upon ... cultures considered non-Western” perpetuate racism (Yon, 2000, p. 8). The erroneous self-righteousness that cultural competence creates, promotes profiling and unjust subjugation. Obsession with mastery and competence in articulating perceived or imagined attributes of others ignores positioning, subjectivity, and the nuanced meanings attached to culture (Hall, 1989).

“Post-modern understanding sees culture as discursive emphasizing, complex relationships of individuals to culture”, (Yon, 2000, p. 9). Although history is replete with examples of how white social workers and teachers did harm to children, the dominant discourse continues to be about white well-meaning benevolence. The cultural competency model employs devaluation, exclusion, scrutiny, and exploitation, to deliberately obscure power and forget colonialism. Cultural competency replaces race language with culture, masking and depoliticizing discursive violence, but what is heightened or forgotten in any era cannot be understood outside the realms of who has power, complicity in framing power, and how it is sustained and reproduced. How does Afrocentric theory inform understanding of cultural

competency? Afrocentric theory recognizes culture is discursive; it provides Black youth an alternative lens and collective safety to challenge Eurocentric attributions (Dei, 2008).

Integrated critical Afrocentric theory recognizes epistemicide and uses “lessons and legacy of history” (Dei, 2003, p. 226) to afford youth the language and tools to resist attempts to profile, regulate, and sanction their lives.

Multiculturalism: Invited to the party but not to dance - Canadians ostensibly value multiculturalism and equality but Canada tacitly accepts inequity despite, or because of, its multicultural rhetoric. James, Este, Thomas Bernard, Benjamin, Lloyd, and Turner (2010) conducted a racism, violence, and health study with African Canadians in Halifax, Calgary, and Toronto. They found that “despite the talk about and evidence of diversity.... racism has the persistence of ragweed in a spinach patch ... Insidious daily effect on people of colour ... powerful and damaging effect on the education they receive” (2010, p. 19). Similarly, Anucha, Dlamini, Chung Yan, and Smylie (2006) utilized a community dialogic approach (CDA) in their study of social capital, race, and other factors among immigrant women in Windsor. They found devaluation of the social capital of African/Caribbean women inimical to multiculturalism rhetoric but hard to confront. “To admit that race influences educational opportunities in Canada is contrary to the multiculturalism policy and long-held myth of colour blindness of Canadians and especially of teachers” (James et al., 2010, p. 180). This partly explains why Canadians tend to believe that racism only exists in the United States or that multiculturalism silences all racial discontent. The African proverb, “*You don’t leave fire on the rooftop and go to sleep*” speaks to this false sense of security by emphasizing the importance of addressing fundamental issues and not wishing them away to avert and avoid serious repercussions which in the context of this study would include riots, terrorism attacks, and heightened racial tensions or conflicts.

Humility and openness to not knowing are needed in Canadian multiculturalism discourses. Mann (2012) ignored lived experiences, focusing on data from government records without question. He echoed ‘family of the nation’ rhetoric without questioning and failed to acknowledge Anglo-Saxon racial prejudice which makes the “family” dysfunctional. On the contrary, James et al. (2010) reported that they as researchers changed through the process: “we ... recognize ... that we do not have all the answers. What we are doing is talking ‘with’ and talking ‘back’ to our communities” (2010, p. 17). Anucha et al.’s (2006) CDA contextualize the complex multicultural lived experiences of study participants by not going in as the experts but relying on respected community informants. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 may be a good first step but does not justify devaluing lived experiences or structural and systemic factors that deny equity to racialized people. The flawed thinking that passing an act in and of itself guarantees equality and freedom from discrimination leads many Canadians to believe that race does not influence how people are treated (James et al., 2010). This is contrary to the everyday experience of Black people as research using CDA or other community building methods have found.

Placing any culture ahead of others directly contradicts Afrocentric decolonizing stance on non-hierarchical nature of cultures. Asante (2003) believes Afrocentrism is a tool of multiculturalism because it acknowledges multicultural and plural knowledge. The abuse of multiculturalism is not a problem of Afrocentrism but of racist multiculturalism that maltreats the original owners of the land and non-European settlers. Asante (2003) contends that countries founded by immigrants must acknowledge multi-ethnic not mono-ethnic curriculum.

Education, to have integrity, must begin with the proposition that all humans have contributed to world development and knowledge.... without a multicultural education, students remain essentially ignorant of the contributions of a major part

of the world's people. A multicultural education is thus a fundamental necessity. (Asante, as cited in Conyers, Jr., 2003, p.240)

Understanding African history and contributions of pan-African leaders and national independence movements are necessary for youth who embody difference. Dei (2003) claims “students do not go to school as disembodied youth” (as cited in Conyers Jr., 2003, p. 225). Although Dei is known for advocating Afrocentric schooling, at no time does he advocate substituting Afrocentric culture over Eurocentrism. Linking equity, social justice, and power-sharing, he insists on the incorporation of multiple knowledge strands for justice and equity. The maintenance of Anglo-Saxon superiority in the school system expects the disadvantaged to be co-opted into empty polemics and forever ignore their own lived experiences to desire change no more. Dei (2008) asserts that “the sites from which we oppress or dominate are those sites upon which we least want to cast our gaze” (p. 226).

The desire for a representative curriculum that includes all learners and all knowledge (spiritual, mental, and affective) seems radical only because Eurocentric curriculum is normalized ‘it is not segregationist. Differences and variety can create synergy in diversity which must be seen as strength because when learners play to their assets, they can enrich the entire learning community. A robust view of multiculturalism goes beyond race but applies to all cultures and isms such as classism and sexism. Education must be about the liberation of all; otherwise, notions of multiculturalism are flawed (hooks, 1994). Perceptions of Canadians about different cultures are reflected in the level of acceptance and expectations towards such groups not just in their words. James et al., (2010) found discrepancies between what Canadians profess and what they do when they witness racism towards Black people (James et al., 2010). Canada is multicultural in theory only, “the impossibility of imagining blackness as Canadian is continually evident even as nation-state policies like multiculturalism seek to signal otherwise”

(Walcott, 2003, p. 48). Afrocentrism insists education cannot promote one culture at the expense of others and points to work needed to transform Canada's schools into multicultural sites in practice. Education for consciousness-raising provides youth with insights and ability to decode racial inferences so they can be informed and empowered by cultural pride to become politically embodied presence in Canada's schools.

Pollack (2003) found that marginalized people may not individually resist "reproducing colonizing relationships and discourses" that dominant discourses perpetuate. To do that would require "developing a structural analysis of individual experiences, and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, and class" (p. 461). In her study with Black incarcerated women, she decried the pathologizing of the women through depicting them as lacking coping skills, self-esteem, and rational abilities by de-contextualizing the women's experiences. Afrocentrism can enable individuals and groups to resist unfounded beliefs about Black deficiency that drives racial oppression and racism by ignoring how racism differs from other forms of marginalization. Pollack had to use focus group methodology to help the women access political meaning-making that was not possible with individual interviews. Similarly, Kubitene et al. (2014) used memorable objects, skits, and video simulation of a racist encounter between a Black male and a white woman to tease out intimate experiences that would not be accessed through more traditional methods. Dlamini and Anucha (2008) and James et al. (2010) echo the importance of listening to lived experience. Racism now takes on subtle forms, making it easier to deny but Pollock (2004) opined that people are not colour blind but choose colour muteness, allowing inequity to fester by hiding behind multiculturalism to avoid speaking up.

Notions of underachievement - Afrocentric knowledge is just one of many knowledge systems, but it is especially important because persistent racial disparities in education are not

coincidental. Africans were colonized and required to speak the language of the colonizers; they are considered incapable of knowing or learning (hooks, 1994). Despite legal advances, Black youth today are marginalized (Dei & Rummens, 2013) and face many forms of racism (Kubilene et al., 2014). Their experiences are sadly reminiscent of bell hooks (1994) description of her experience in desegregated schools as like being in prison. Studies show high numbers of new youth to Canada do not complete high school, up to 74% in some jurisdictions, compared to the mainstream average at 12% to 25% (James et al., 2010). Changes in schools have not kept pace with demographic changes such as the racial, ethnic mix of students. According to Dei (2008) the beliefs that Black youth especially males, underachieve because they are unmotivated, lazy, and criminal puts the blame on youth for the failure of schools to engage them. He conceded that families have responsibilities, but stated that they are not responsible for schools eroding Black youth confidence and love of learning.

Underachievement among Black youth requires critical examination through an Afrocentric filter which promotes openness to valid and ignored questions. When in 2007 Waterloo Region schools performed below provincial averages in the provincial literacy and math tests, immigrant children were conveniently blamed for the poor results (Oba, 2007). There was, however, no empirical evidence of cities with lower immigrant populations outperforming those with more immigrants. If immigrants are to blame for low results, then Toronto and other cities with huge immigrant populations would record below provincial average results, but the provincial results told a different story. Furthermore, if immigrants were to blame similar decline would be proportionately reflected in all the region's schools but Waterloo Region Catholic schools did not suffer a similar decline (Oba, 2007). There was no basis for making immigrants responsible for the low-test scores. Even if an influx of immigrants

contributed to the problems, the failure of the Region to engage them, rather than racial proclivity, was the problem. Denial ensures there is no desire to learn from other cities or to develop pro-active immigrant engagement strategies.

A more fundamental problem is the lack of commitment to promoting achievement of all students and quick jettisoning of multiculturalism and colour blindness whenever there is a crisis and thereby distancing “the other.” The issues faced by Black African youth shrouded by hegemonic discourses are illuminated when racial euphemisms such as underachievement of Black youth are deconstructed. According to Dei et al. (1995), Black youth reported they were haunted by labels and punitive policies such as the zero-tolerance policy, but teachers justified the exclusionary measures. When teachers and school administrators exclude some children in their pursuit of better school performance by invoking race, colour, and immigrant status, in the public consciousness, racism and marginalization are justified. Black youth especially are caught in a web, whereby they are marginalized by racism, blamed for underachieving, and fear of them is heightened by the media (Wortley, 2002). This dilemma, in John Ogbu’s (1992) opinion, caused Black youth to underachieve because education required them to “act white” even though they are not and cannot be white. He argued that some Black youth considered education futile, having seen the devaluation of their parents’ qualifications. Ogbu was harshly criticized by scholars (Cokley, 2003; Hamman, E.T, 2004) who pointed to high achieving Black youth as evidence to discredit Ogbu’s views and Cokley (2003), argued Ogbu’s position was ironic as Blacks fought for the right to education.

Making Eurocentric education synonymous with intellect abandons the liberation goal of education. hooks (1994) was marginalized, stifled, and silenced in predominantly white schools. She experienced both segregated and desegregated schools. She was not against desegregation

but could not also ignore the deficiency focus, low expectations, and erasure of her Black identity in the white schools? If acting white is the route to success, what does that say about blackness, must Black students become un-black to receive an education? The fact that some Black youth do surmount the added burden like hooks did, in no way minimizes the trauma endure. To be authentically Black is not equivalent to being anti-intellectual or devaluing education (Dei 1995) and a quest for justice or liberation and intellectual prowess are not mutually exclusive (hooks, 1994).

Resistance to the politics of schooling (Giroux, 1981), unjust attitudes, assumptions, delivery, and expectations (Dei, 2010), and coercive Eurocentric educational systems (Giroux 2003) are not synonymous with disdaining education. My critical Afrocentric model shed light on racial euphemisms in hegemonic discourses that employ victim blaming under the guise of examining underachievement. Afrocentrism upholds the radical idea that education is a human right and Black people are humans entitled to education not just if they acquiesce and act white. hooks (1990) demonstrates that those who “achieve” and those who do not, equally suffer and pay a high price for being Black, therefore, the dichotomies are artificial.

“Dropout” or “Pushout”: Names are sacred, not semantics - Dei, Holmes, Mazzuca, McIsaac, and Campbell (1997) coined the phrase “push out” to highlight the discursive violence behind the exclusion of Black youth from schools. Renaming the longing for freedom from the grip of Eurocentrism disrupts the common use of the term “dropout” that blames youth for their exclusion from mainstream schools. Dei et al. (1997) argued that educational disparity derives from society’s systems and structures and not an individual deficiency. If the system favours those who are White or act white, it makes sense that it disadvantages those who are not. McIntosh (1995) famously said of white privilege, “I realized I had been taught about racism as

something that puts others at a disadvantage but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage” (p. 76). Schools’ race-based practices reflect taken-for-granted norms and values in society. Racist policies and attitudes are not benign; whether subconscious or intentional they impact real humans and so reflect issues of justice and equity. Having the advantage confers the responsibility to discard the guise of colour blindness or colour muteness and begin to act against subtle acts of racism (Pollock, 2004); otherwise “no one is responsible for any act, omission, or outcome whose moral or prudential defects can be traced to his lack of imagination, his lapses of attention, his (sic) poor judgment, or his lack of insight” (Sher, 2009, p. 7). To be oblivious to one’s advantages, power, and privilege does not absolve those who enjoy those benefits of responsibility. To ignore the injuries and added burdens inflicted on “the other” while enjoying freedom from such burdens and feeling justified in blaming the injured for dropping out is unjust. The drop out discourse disregards the predicament of Black African youth in the school system

In my experience, Black pupils like other children, are eager to go to school; feeling grown up and excited about entering a vast new world, but their enthusiasm is soon shattered as they get caught in the futility of laboring to be white and daily injuries to their psyche at school. These issues are masked in the drop out discourse but applying my critical Afrocentric model lens involved asking is it “drop out”, “pushout” or something else when unable to bear the hurt, the wounded seeks any escape, as depicted by a respondent in Kumsa (2005):

I was in [White School]. For the longest time, they treated me like I didn't exist! You're going to school every day with these people, and I swear to God they don't acknowledge your presence! Not even a nod, not a hello! I learned to run away from them. Oh, I still feel it! There were older Black students, a couple of them. They smiled at me in the hallway. I used to love that!! They graduated the first year and then there was nothing! After three years, I said no more! I quit and that's what saved me. I swear I would have lost my mind if I stayed (p. 6)

CRT theorist Derrick Bell (1992, 2009) understood that schools, like the rest of Western society, are mediated by whiteness and addressed the complexity of making racism in Western institutions and systems apparent to White people by using role reversals. Similarly, skits and simulations were employed by Kubitene et al. (2014) to help Black youth talk about the pain inflicted by racism which caused a desire some to seek escape. Sometimes the escape that those wounded by racism choose may look like anything but escape to those who do not have to live it. A simple uninformed perspective only sees self-destruction, failing to appreciate the meaning of the actions. To blame Black children for dropping out is to adopt a psychological shield that ignores the complexities of racism and enables society to avoid confronting their culpability in pushing Black youth out of schools, into the streets (Roots of Violence Report, 2008). Davies (2012) stated that “racism changes and mutates over time”, adding that “because racism hides in the structures of our society, in the educational system, the prison system, the health care system etc., it can do more damage than ever without provoking the kind of resistance that led to the end of racial segregation (p.79). The debate about drop out or push out may appear to be semantics but names are very significant in African cultures and reflected in proverbs and sayings that transmit the beliefs and ideologies about names. In Africa names are sacred, the hopes, meaning, identity, and spiritual significance of a child's birth are often encapsulated in the names given to them in elaborate naming ceremonies, involving elders and extended family hence “it is the home that we look at in order give a child a name”. The context is very important, and names connect children to their heritage, reinforcing the child’s special place and identity in the family and larger society. Another Nigerian proverb says, “the name you will give your newborn lies deep within” referring to the care, prayer, and thoughtfulness that accompanies child naming

where names flow from the depths because there is recognition of the gravity of naming and labelling.

When adults at school system disdain the African names given to children by their parents and revered elders, it causes tension and identity confusion for African children. The imposition of labels of deficiency and pathology assaults the sense of self of African children as the tradition is that elders proclaim blessings on children. Learning to mistrust adults leaves the youth feeling vulnerable and can impact learning because they in turn must learn from the same adults. A critical Afrocentric model helps to challenge Eurocentrism and remind Black youth of their origins, giving them a place (especially the males who feel more alienated) to run to, spiritually and emotionally when the school climate proves unsafe.

The plight of Black males is a cause for concern, and it behooves women to see the parallels between the oppressive lens that patriarchy used to construct females as the other and now uses to oppress non-White males. Women were “the other”; hysterical, incapable, and illogical which is how Black males are portrayed and depicted in the present times. Women know what it is like to be oppressed because of gender and must be able to empathize with other forms of oppression and rise against injustice meted out to Black African young men and women. Black women fought for civil rights and for women’s rights, it is not a hierarchy or competition but according to Mullaly (2010) the myth of scarcity pitches one against the other. What Black women did in the fight for women’s rights they continue to do for all marginalized people because to do otherwise amounts to destroying the ladder that buoyed them up. As advocates fighting for themselves and others, Black women may be labeled angry but both the pain of racism and terror of unbridled patriarchy are real. Women did not just deconstruct patriarchy but through different waves of feminism, women showed that hegemonic

constructions which excluded an entire gender had no factual basis in all spheres of human endeavor. What women endured in the area of gender applies to racialization and therefore it would be natural to be able to empathize with and advocated for the rights of Black African youth. The decade of people of African descent provides an opportunity for feminism to interrogate race relations and engage with issues currently being highlighted by academics and activists such as the Black Lives Matter movement.

Notions of resistance - Today, it is Blacks who are creating movements to further challenge attempts to exclude a whole race of Homo sapiens. Prevailing discourses are nuanced rather than factual as they reflect hegemonic labels and stereotypes. Afrocentrism promotes agency, i.e., a sense of being in control that is informed by appreciation and cultural validation. Currently, mainstream schools deny Black history, culture, and contributions (James & Braithwaite, 1996), stifle resistance and critical thinking (Giroux, 2010), making it necessary to choose between resistance and amputation of parts of one's self (Fanon, 1967). Labelling disenfranchised Black youth resistant and criminalizing their responses to coercive education subsumes roots of systemic inequalities. Teachers who fail to acknowledge their privilege are blind to the impact of racism on Black students and resistant to change, limiting their ability to make curriculum and resources culturally relevant (Dei et al., 1995, 1997). Black African youth are not just passively absorbing racism and discrimination but rather both male and female resist (Dei, 1995; Ogbu; 1974; Wortley; & Owusu-Bempah, 2012). They may resist in different ways, and the ways they resist may mask their sense of agency as they make choices for self-preservation in the face of racism.

Ali, (2003), Kumsa et al. (2013), and Mirza (2009) documented the resistance of girls in two separate UK and Canadian studies. While the girls in the UK studies resisted in covert

ways, the Canadian case study demonstrated that resistance is not always quiet and passive.

Kumsa et al. (2013) describe a teenage girl standing up to a stranger who derided her immigrant father. Afterward, she chided her father on his non-Canadian ways and was far from passive as a family defender, educator, and spokesperson. Her actions showed personal agency, reflected the tensions of straddling dual cultures and heightened awareness of injustice. Mirza (2009) found that Black girls resisted just as much as Black males even though girls were portrayed as exotic docile “successes.” The girls in her study resisted western systems’ devaluation of their parents and resented the attribution of their success to following their mother’s paths. They actively disliked the lives of their mothers and the constraints society placed on them as race, gender, and class discrimination shut doors against them, leaving them few options just as it had done their mothers, some of whom left their daughters in their quest for elusive opportunities.

Walcott (2003) illustrates the use of contemporary literature in addressing sensitive issues in his commentary on Brand’s novel, *In Another Place, Not Here*. Walcott said, “Brand’s insistence on refusing to render the displacements and reconciliations of mothers with daughters as simple and uncomplicated is important” (p. 53). The girls appear to acquiesce but resist by seizing options, escape oppression and achieve career and status. Their resistance was not overt, such as joining a gang, but involved deep multi-layered inner tensions and frustration. Simplistic theorizations ignore the realities of both males and females. Brand (as cited in Walcott, 2003) captures the pain of daughters reuniting with mothers who left them to come to Canada.

They sent for us, sent for us their daughters, and then washed our faces in their self-hatred. Self-hatred they had learned from the white people ... whose hatred they had swallowed.... they saw their hands swollen with water, muscular with lifting and pulling, they saw their souls assaulted and irrecoverable, wounded from insult and the sheer nastiness of white worlds ... they made us pay for what they had suffered... they did not feel redeemed by it but themselves had been so twisted from walking in shame that they twisted our bodies to suit their stride. (p. 53)

Frere (2000) posits that decolonization originates in human consciousness, thinking, and attitudes. He urges readers to transcend the rebellion of reacting to injustices by articulating one's own cultural identity. Afrocentrism does this by providing an alternative framework that centers an African worldview without polarizing acquiescence or resistance. A critical Afrocentric lens does not view acquiescence as the absence of resistance and does not consider resistance as inherently negative. Simplistic notions in dominant discourse represent what Michel Foucault describes as the inseparability of power and resistance (1979). The fact that hegemonic discourse portrays Black youth resistance as evil, criminal, and anti-intellectual may be because such resistance relocates them in subject-object positions. Hegemony is threatened by implications of Black youth taking their place and resists balancing the power differential.

However, the 1990 *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, (United Nations Human Rights, Office of The High Commissioner) clearly articulates that children are to be protected and their rights ensured. Article 17 says they have the right to get information that is important to their well-being, while Article 18 states that they have the right to be protected from being hurt or mistreated in body or mind. If they are maltreated in body or mind, they have the right to resist. Article 28 unequivocally states, "... young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable," while Article 30 seeks to protect minority children whose culture differs from the majority and states, "[M]inority or indigenous children have the right to learn about and practice their own culture, language, and religion. The right to practice one's own culture, language and religion applies to everyone; the convention highlights this right in instances where the practices are not shared by the majority of people in a country."

<p>"May we never break the strong spirits of our daughters; May we teach our sons to become loving and nurturing men. In doing so, we hold the key to universal peace." Author unknown</p>
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Males and females respond to discrimination, marginalization, and racism in both overt and covert manners. Their experience of the violence of racism is also not the same (Jiwani, 2006). Scholarship on Black males document stereotypical images of criminals, rapists, dangerous, hypersexual, lazy males (Kubilene et al., 2014), while media portrays them as dropouts, gangsters, drug pushers, and violent criminals (Wortley, 2002). Gender is also associated with educational outcomes, with immigrant girls outperforming boys. Dei et al. (1995), in a study of Toronto Black high school students, quote a respondent saying, “black boys have it worse; you have to act like you want to fight even if you don’t want to ... and you’re pushed to just do sports and if a Black guy’s smart ... they don’t want to talk about it” (p. 51). Boys are more likely targets of school violence, suffer more physical aggression and racism, and are at greater risk than girls (Ogbu, 1992; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009). Black boys are shot and murdered or imprisoned at alarming rates, and they are perceived as threats and treated as culpable in Canadian schools (Foster, 1996;) Henry et al., 1995).

Representations of Black girls as exotic creatures, lacking radical or political ability even when they employ agency, persist (Ali, 2003; Mirza, 2009). The media renders their resistance invisible by perpetuating images of victims oppressed by culture. Ali (2003) notes that Black women enrolling in educational institutions at higher rates than men is considered proof of Black male pathology in dominant discourse. However, simplistic explanations hide cultural safety concerns for both genders in educational institutions. Mirza (2009) summed it up by saying that Black girls do not stay in school because the system is perfect, but because they are aware of their lack of options compared to their male counterparts and feel excluded from middle-class professions (Mirza, 2009). In Ali’s (2003) study “stereotyping” was frequently mentioned. Most common stereotypes for girls arise from discourses of desirable femininities for adult women

based on raced and classed differences. Thus, even when their resistance is acknowledged, it is pathologized by being equated with being angry, low-class, or uncultured rather than seeing them as acts of self-awareness. Such labels are utilized to silence women's consciousness-raising through shaming, disciplining, and controlling their bodies and actions.

A 2003 case study in selected Commonwealth countries found that schools expected underperformance of boys in all subjects and post-feminist discourse portrays girls as universally more successful than boys (Jha & Kelleher, 2006). The study further suggested ways to mitigate underachievement of boys but also called for further relevant studies in other countries to determine the prevalence, causes, and solutions in different contexts. The authors warn that growing global concern about male underachievement need not obliterate concerns about girls in contexts where it is relevant. The most pressing concerns of each community must be prioritized so resources can be applied as needed (Boyer, 2005). Attending to the context of each community is important in research with women (Dlamini & Anucha, 2006). Studies exploring the experiences of Black females are scant as society remains complicit in their oppression, perpetuating simplified meanings of success as passive acquiescence to an assimilation agenda on the part of model females. Similar narratives portray some groups as model immigrants, pathologizing assertive self-awareness and systematically fragmenting vulnerable populations by instilling fear or reinforcing negative labels (Oba, 2016).

<p>“Eni oran o ba ti npe rare ni okunrin” – Those who have not encountered trouble or misfortune describes themselves as valiant or successful ” (Nigerian proverb)</p>

Elusive success

African proverbs encapsulate much wisdom in few words. According to the above proverb, if you have not faced the challenges another has faced, it is easy to beat the chest and boast while disparaging the other. Another common proverb urges us to walk a mile in the shoes of “the other.” Indeed, comedians rightfully opined in the hue and cry over Black Lives Matter that no Black person wants to time travel back to pre-1900s, but White people can do so, and expect to be treated well. Many white people assume that when Black people are maltreated, they must have done something to deserve it. It is not hard to see why they would think so because, for them, that would be true as they have not encountered what Blacks do. White people generally do not just get shot by the police for doing nothing; in fact, seldom get stopped without reason and teachers do not just fear them or speculate negatively about their academic success. All these things do happen to motivated, hard-working, morally upright, intelligent, and high achieving Black people, we must, therefore, rethink racial euphemisms. Dei (1995, 2011) urges a redefinition of success to include the moral, social, spiritual, and cultural development of the person, not just performance of whiteness or acquisition of socially sanctioned symbols of success. Hegemonic discourses view the knowledge possessed by Blacks as outsider knowledge or transgressive, and/or Black Africans as innately deficient. In reality, most Black African youth come with strengths, strong family ties, and educational aspirations, which decline the longer they reside in western society (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009). A respondent in Dei’s (1995) study said, “[O]ne teacher told me once, ‘You’re not like the rest of them,’ I didn’t ask her what that meant but believe me, I knew” (p. 26). The notion of the successful African youth as atypical only exists against the social construction of what is typical. This informs dominant views about success and who can be a creator of knowledge but deviates from African egalitarian systems that promote worth, restoration, and interconnectedness of all people.

The idea that successes depend on attributes you either have or do not have based on your race is reflected in Bourdieu's (1986) analysis of how to advance in life culturally (cited in Yosso, 2005). It advances notions that non-white people have inherent deficits, which they can overcome by imitating whiteness. Thus, although his theorization is helpful to challenge universality and neutrality of Eurocentric worldviews, it is fundamentally flawed because it assumes white people possess superior cultural capital. Such an assumption supports policies of assimilation ignoring the delegitimization of knowledge garnered from the school of life. Stories and proverbs are disdained as folklore (Oba, 2016). Centering Blacks Reframes the discourse and Ladson Billings (2006) says the school system owes Blacks education as well as a historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral debt. Dei (1995) says schools have failed Black children as Eurocentric schools prepare Black youth to be white (Asante, 1992) and fail to consider their health and wellbeing (James et al., 2010). They fail to equip them for living as authentic Blacks and disdain their *embodied* identity (Dei, 2010) leading to pathologizing, criminalizing, or labeling "the other" as risky (Pollack, 2010). Although hooks wrote in 1994, transgressive education remains relevant as it aligns with Afrocentric theory's position on reconstructing, affirming, and centering Blacks. The debt owed to Black people has to be recognized for it to be paid; Black youth can be emboldened by African-centered consciousness to unapologetically pursue transformation rather than superficial reforms that perpetuate subjugation.

Integration/segregation debate

The issue of superficial reforms discussed above in part led to the development of critical race theory in the 1970s by scholars concerned about the slow pace of racial reforms (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1993; Crenshaw, Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Delgado, 1995) who desired to make visible, subtler forms of racism in the post-civil rights movement era). Although the civil rights movement achieved profound legal changes and phenomenal advances for Black people, discursive racism continues to hinder social transformation. People who are plagued by their own insecurities may not easily embrace others or counteract unexamined notions of Eurocentric universality (Oba, 2016). Self-fulfilling beliefs about African anti-intellectuality, promote school alienation practices that are mutually reinforcing. The desire to not merely deconstruct and disprove Eurocentric ideas but using Afrocentric epistemology as the fulcrum makes Afrocentric schooling attractive. It provides a site for not only countering imposed social constructions but proactively adopting pedagogical strategies that aligns with our ontological selves. Du Bois (1973) described double consciousness as a state whereby Blacks are aware of an invisible curriculum and are always negotiating conflicting identities. Mainstream schools work towards an agenda of assimilation by punishing non-compliance to dominant society norms with no willingness to accommodate differences despite Canadian multiculturalism rhetoric (Bannerji, 2000; Walcott, 2003; James, 2001). The question remains, “[F]eminists, post-racial scholars, and critical thinkers flock the halls, but do they understand? Multicultural rhetoric, use of self, cultural competency, and tolerance are professed, but is tolerance acceptance?” (Oba, 2016, p. 119)

In this section, I have critically examined concepts, debates, and discourses using a critical Afrocentric lens. Discourses of domination as commonsense stock of knowledge led to agitation for decolonizing schooling that would include African epistemology.

Afrocentric Schools

Demands for Afrocentric schools regardless of their limitations forced conversations by re-conceptualizing the nature of discourse and definition of issues, placing African concerns on the front burner, and focusing on underlying roots of the problem i.e. the context of education. Hampton (2010) examined the reasons for community agitation for Afrocentric public schools in Montreal. She concluded that although the movement did not succeed in Montreal as it did in Toronto, Black youth would find safety, meaning, and benefit in education that resonates with their life experiences and the values of their community. Proponents of Afrocentric schools argued that the school system does not fulfill the goals of integration as true multiculturalism, the Toronto District School Board voted to establish Afrocentric Schools to integrate “the histories, cultures, experiences, and contributions of people of African and other racialized groups into the ... social environment of schools” (TDSB, 2008, p.1). Knowledge that is both critical of existing arrangements and centered in pro-African ideals allows youth to run into the affirmation of their cultural heritage if Afrocentric learning is integrated and incorporated. hooks (1994) succeeded in the mainstream school through the adoption of transgressive strategies. While the existing isolated Afrocentric schools support some Black Students the majority of Black learners in Canada will attend mainstream schools. Those in Afrocentric schools are not exempt from racism as they shop, work, and reside in the same society that informs the racism in schools which are microcosms of society. Schools as primary sites of socialization influence the life trajectories of every child into adulthood because attendance is mandatory during the formative years and the school is the only institution outside the family wielding such influence over the lives of children.

The trauma Black youth suffer at school does not just happen and is not innocuous (Dei & Rummens, 2014). To marginalize... is something that is done by someone to someone else ... it is educators, teachers, ...other adults, and peers, who through their identifications, their “seeing” and “not-seeing,” their social inclusion or exclusion – relegate certain individuals and social groups toward the edge of the societal boundary, away from the core of import. Marginalization is thus a process, not a label – a process of social de-valuation that serves to justify disproportional access to scarce societal resources. As social actors, we do this to others. Because of our own agency, we can also change this. (Dei & Rummens, 2014, Para. 2)

Proponents of Afrocentric schools argued that safe and culturally appropriate schooling is a human right (Brown, 2005), while opponents feared Afrocentric schools signal the beginning of ethnic splinter schools and precipitate a regression to segregation contrary to Canadian ideals of integration (Thompson & Wallner, 2010). Dissent begs the question: if Canadians detest segregation and desire integration, why do schools remain Eurocentric? Why does the school system continue to resist every attempt to integrate the knowledge and history of Black people (Dei, 2000) even though the Ontario education ministry specifies that curriculum should be representative (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009)? The argument that Afrocentric schools lack empirical validity or efficacy (Dragnea & Erling, 2008; Manning, 2008) sounds hollow against the background of the system’s colossal failure and unwillingness to transform. Changing what happens in the schools would require examination of society’s structures and inform the need to fortify Black youth with the hope and awareness that contribute to their spiritual and collective safety. Ladson-Billings (1995) studied the use of pedagogy that affirms Black culture. One of the teachers in her study invited parents of Black students as resource persons to remind the students of their cultural capital. An appreciative affirming lens removes the need to act

white; it enables reclamation of identity through critical thinking, awareness, knowledge, and consciousness-raising that enables Black youth to be fully present as subjects and not objects.

Dei (2008) notes that Black youth may not feel as entitled as their white peers because of discursive and material effects of deficiency labels.

Schooling has “largely failed in its promise to promote a more egalitarian society” and, instead, “in content and process, contributes to the subordination of substantial segments of the population the social dimensions that contribute to differing educational experiences and outcomes (Wotherspoon, 2009, p. 33, 232)

Canada gets away with the inhumanity of “white streaming” in spite of professing the goal of integration. Dominant society fails to link racism to inhumanity by believing that integration is possible without structural transformation. Berry’s (2008) model of acculturation defines integration as reciprocal acculturation where minority and mainstream groups mutually respect one another. Berry ignores race and power, presenting integration as mutual and neatly compartmentalized. Sethi (2014) found that Berry’s model failed to address the complexities in immigrant women’s lives. Similarly, the model fails to account for power dimensions or multifaceted social location in the lives of Black youth. His definition of segregation as the imposition of separation on a group by the dominant society and exclusion as marginalization forced on ethnic people by the dominant (Berry, 2005) are, however, useful. If segregation is imposed, then Afrocentric schools are not a choice but the only option left for Blacks when dominant society fails to marry power with social justice and responsibility for inclusion.

The Black community recognizes that Eurocentric systems of education continue to leave its youth behind through its constructions of success, achievement, resistance, and integration. Afrocentric discourses illuminate how Black youth are left behind metaphorically, culturally (James et al., 2010), ontologically (Dei, 1997), cognitively, spiritually, and psychologically (Dei et al., 1995). Before Toronto’s Afrocentric Schools were established, the Black Learners

Advisory Committee (BLAC) successfully advocated for the opening of an Afrocentric school in Nova Scotia in 1995, followed by an Afrocentric Learning Institute in 1996 to promote anti-racism teacher training. Radical transformation of fundamental systems and attitudes or system-wide change, however, proved elusive due to entrenched attitudes (Dei et al., 1995).

Most teachers interviewed by Dei and his colleagues failed to recognize any problems in the educational system and, instead, identified factors within the students' characters, the characters of the students' families or the students' earlier educational experiences. A prominent feature of the teachers' responses was the construction of drop-outs as socially and academically deficient in their families, their values and their attitudes towards education. Far too many teachers in Canada viewed racism as a myth perpetuated by "at risk" youth (or by "limited" parents) who were seen as targeting innocent, well-meaning educators with a false accusation. (Hampton, 2010, p. 105)

Describing Black teachers on a mission to ensure their students advanced politically, economically, and otherwise, hooks (1994) said they took an interest in knowing her person, home, family, even where she worshiped. Nostalgically, she described the school as a place of pleasure and ecstasy. For hooks (1994) as is the case for Black youth who were considered incapable of learning and expected to obey, not think, and mimic their white peers, the school felt like a prison. Dei (2008) contends that schools do not take responsibility for the problems they create for Black students. The realization that Black immigrant youth's educational aspirations decline based on length of residence in western society (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009) necessitates informed interventions that address the root causes.

If the status quo is unjust and fails to deliver education for liberation, the problem is not with education but with the system of delivery. The stated purpose of education makes it a

viable tool for social transformation. However, changing the larger systems requires excluded people to have opportunities to create “tools to not only talk about injustice and oppression but also to do something about it” (Grant & Sleeter, 2007, p. 180). It will take more than altered curriculum to change schools, legislatures, community organizations, corporate offices, and courts. Change in school curriculum must be backed by changes in power relations and educational change must contribute to liberation (Frere, 1970), societal change, and social justice (Dei, 1997). A culturally relevant education approach (outlined by Ladson- Billings, 1995) is most effective when it can also disrupt knowledge (Delgado & Staples, 2008). This review of literature illuminates the concerns of Black youth in the school system and highlights the need to integrate Afrocentric education into public schools. A plan to engage the growing numbers of Africans in big and small Canadian city schools rather than merely denouncing agitation for Afrocentric schools would serve the Black youth better and build a more cohesive society.

Conclusion

This review demonstrates that Afrocentrism captures textured contextual processes and affirms the importance of education that situates students within their cultural contexts. The review also shows a lack of system-wide commitment to plural epistemology as hegemonic discourse maintains Eurocentrism as normative and universal. Lindo (2011) argues it is easy for teachers to accommodate issues of race into mainstream rubric but they are reluctant to address issues of race and racism. Schools represent the society, and Canada’s multiculturalism fails to interrogate power and perpetuates blaming of Black youth for the racism they encounter (Dei et al., 1995; Hampton, 2010). Afrocentrism centralizes the African and is, therefore, able to contextualize disenfranchisement of Black youth.

Afrocentric discourse facilitates nuanced understanding of everyday school experiences of Black African youth and creates spaces for other well-developed systems of knowledge to stand in contrast to the dominant Euro-American epistemology (Dei, 1995). Eurocentric imaginations about social institutions are based on conceptualizations of the west. Tilliotson and McDougal (2013) recognized that the world's problems impact the world's people in different and varied ways. Multicultural and anti-racism pedagogy has been slow in achieving the objective of equalizing opportunities for racial and ethnic minorities because of educator ambivalence, contradictory responses, or outright antagonism to its concept, policy, and practice. De-historicizing education contradicts the ethics of social work and is intolerable. Dei (2008) asserts, "Difference is all around us and has always been, but the difference of today is no longer willing to remain silent" (p. 6). Afrocentrism is not just a theoretical construct but social activism that centers and focuses on the needs of Africans, which although seeming radical, aligns with social work values and the role of education in challenging epistemic injustice.

The success of our endeavors for meaningful change in our schools depends on how far we are willing to go to match good intentions with concrete deeds. We all expect our students to learn and utilize their education to improve their lives and those of their communities. But such learning is only possible if the resources, the environment, and the desires are existent and available in the educational context for the learner.... Black/African and minority education in Canada must embrace the importance of the creative self and personhood as a path to individual and collective knowledge (Dei, 2008, p. 348). Education must encourage liberation (Frere, 2005). Alternative models such as Afrocentric schools and alternative community programming cannot ensure system-wide social change without interrogating subconscious issues of racism, bias, and power. Du Bois (1935) noted, "The Negro need neither segregated schools nor mixed

schools, what he needs is education” (p. 120). This critical examination has shown that an Afrocentric exploration can illuminate Black youth experiences by envisioning them as central and able to reclaim space and voice (Asante, 2009).

The two major theories Afrocentric and critical race theory are very salient for exploring the lived realities of Black and other marginalized populations. However, these populations are not homogenous; therefore additional concepts such as Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, Bourdieu’s habitus, Du Bois notion of double consciousness and Foucault’s panopticon enable the examination of post-modern and post-racial discourses. In addition, the limitations of the two main theories in terms of addressing experiences of subject positions impacted by intersections of race, gender, disability, sexism and heteronormativity are highlighted by the complexity and richness of the findings of this study, as discussed in the next chapter. In particular experiences of Black females and their performance of woman hood are illuminated by feminist discourses, intersectionality theory. The work of Black feminist scholars shed light on the egalitarian approach of having youth and elders as participants in the study. These theorists demonstrate the artificiality of binaries and complex interconnections among those impacted by oppressions regardless at personal, social, cultural and structural levels.

Chapter 3: Methodology

“Owe leshin oro, bi oro ba sonu, owe la fi nwa”- Proverbs are the compass by which we find our way through life’s riddles. When meaning must be found, proverbs guide the way.” (Nigerian, Yoruba proverb)

Based on insights from the literature review, it was important to me that I not reproduce Eurocentric positivistic research through a methodology that treats Africans as passive objects of western fancy or curiosity. Of many approaches to qualitative research (Charmaz, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Babbie, 2011), the focus on marginalization and culture in Creswell (2007) and Afrocentric approaches for qualitative research resonated with me. Taken together they show that alternative approaches can be scholarly, rigorous, and intellectual in the tradition of qualitative research. The Afrocentric qualitative mode of inquiry aligns with my research focus and, in this chapter, I offer a roadmap of the paradigm, research design, methodology, and procedures undertaken in this Afrocentric study. I discuss the usual methodology tasks –participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. The research paradigm describes theoretical underpinnings, purpose, and their relevance for examining the main research question. The rationale for choosing a qualitative research design was its salience for a study on Black African youth. Triangulated methods enabled me to access rich, deep, layered, contextual data through respectful, culturally affirming participant engagement, rather than extractive research. The collegial, participatory, community-oriented data collection process consisted of youth dialogue, in-depth life stories, and intergenerational group dialogue that epitomize decolonizing, wholistic research by layering the best of African ways of knowing, being and doing onto this research endeavour.

“Bere bere, o ki nsina - One who asks never gets lost.” (Nigerian, Yoruba proverb)
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Research Question

What are the experiences of alienation among Black African Youth in Waterloo region?

To tease apart the above main research question which I sought to answer in this dissertation study, I explored the following specific questions:

- Do Black African Youth think any efforts are being made to include African knowledge, history, and contributions in the public-school curriculum?
- Do Black African Youth feel safe, welcome, included, and accepted at school?
- Have Black African youth experienced racial slurs, name-calling, bullying, ostracization, harsh punishments, exclusion, and or marginalization at school
- How effective are the teachers in recognizing, naming and sensitively responding to acts of racism, marginalization, and exclusion toward Black African youth at school?
- What are the effects of racism and alienation on Black youth?
- How much support have Black African youth had from school social workers regarding addressing effects of racial alienation?
- What meaning do Black African Youth ascribe to their experiences, what hinders or aids their access, belonging and achievement at school?
- What or who helps Black African Youth find belonging, support, hope, and inspiration?
- What strategies do Black African youth deploy in responding to their experiences of alienation or outright racism at school?
- What would Black African youth want to see happen at school to enhance their educational engagement and access to post secondary education?

“Eranko aginju oni alagba wi, lo je ki ode joye akoni ogun” (The hunter is the hero of the stories until the animals get a storyteller.” (Nigerian proverb)

Rationale for Qualitative Critical Afrocentric Research Design

Afrocentrism undergirds my choice of a qualitative research design for this study as it affords me the opportunity to utilize African ethnophilosophy to understand how Black African youth navigate the school system. I designed the research with a focus on community utility and benefit (Dei, 2011; Tilliotson & McDougall, 2013). I am transparent about this motivation informed by the daily media images of Black youth being killed by police. Despite the palpable fear in “Black Lives Matter” marches, courageous people managed to record what actually transpired in these deaths at the hands of police. This strengthened my resolve to ensure visibility of Black youth experiences in Waterloo region. The United Nations had in December 2014 declared the decade 2015 to 2017 the decade for people of African origin and global events reinforced the relevance and timeliness of the decade and of my dissertation.

African epistemology offers unique opportunities for knowledge co-creation as well as textured, layered, and contextualized data that quantitative methods may not allow. Qualitative research focuses on meaning-making about a phenomenon and enables exploration of context and complexity using a variety of data collection sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2009). Afrocentric research honors knowledge that resonates with Africans: “It is based on the philosophical position that we must understand Africa on its own terms” (Dei, 2011, p. 348). I believed that to understand the “what” (nature) and the “how” (context) of alienation would require an authentic tool that enables participant perspective-taking. In studying issues that may defy quantification, understanding in the field can be enhanced by capturing the emotions and sensitivities behind answers as well as non-verbal communications, which may not be possible in positivistic quantitative or laboratory studies. In exploring the phenomenon of alienation among

Black African youth, I was not focused on numbers, generalizations or causality but wanted to capture nuances and depth of experiences that characterize qualitative studies (Creswell, 2009).

Afrocentric collectivist ethos eschews apathy; knowing compels you to act and research is not speculative but pragmatic. Research and practice combine to create change and solve real-world problems for real people. “Knowledge and survival go hand in hand.... our work must be community oriented and grounded in the needs of the community” (Dei, 2011, p. 7).

Afrocentrism views research as cultural reclamation, using African epistemology to restore colonial disruptions (Dei, 2011). It is specifically about using decolonizing indigenous knowledge to counter ahistorical positioning. Re-humanizing Africans through correcting misrepresentations rooted in essentialization or abstention can advance healing (Walcott, 2003) because Afrocentrism is constructivist, exploring the subjective meanings Africans make of their circumstances and ensures multiple African manifestations are visible (Dei, 2010). Participating in qualitative research can be therapeutic (Morse, 1998). Telling one’s stories in African-centered qualitative research is especially therapeutic and transformative because Europeans told the story of Africa from their own perspective (Akbar, 1998). As a Black African researcher, mother, and clinician familiar with facilitating therapy groups, I see the potential Afrocentrism has, to promote healing combating oppression and colonial domination. Afrocentric strategies promoted cultural heritage, honoured African thought and afforded participants’ opportunities to move from being victims to social change catalysts (Dei, 1997, 2000). The worldview, normative assumptions, and referential frame upon which the paradigm is based must like the science they serve, be consistent with the culture and cultural substance of the people. When the paradigm is inconsistent with the cultural definition of the phenomena, the people who use it to assess and or

evaluate that phenomena become essentially conceptually incarcerated. (Cited in Mazama, 2003, p. 132)

Race denial or color blindness are codes that attempt to mask hegemonic views of blackness as dis-ability (Kumsa, Mfoafo-M'Carthy, Oba, & Gassim, 2014) and amount to amputation (Fanon, 1967). Afrocentrism recognizes the complexity of the world's problems and the unique ways different populations are impacted (Asante, 2000; Dei, 1997, 2008; Tilliotson & McDougall, 2013). Knowledge possessed by Blacks has long been regarded as transgressive (hooks, 1994); Eurocentric knowing is elevated over indigenous knowledge because it is seen as objective and scientific (Shizha, 2008). My socialization and familiarity with Afrocentrism ensured I was not just appropriating or using African worldview as bait but was grounded in the ideological foundations of indigenous Afrocentric research. That is not to suggest that Afrocentrism is universal or essentialist; it re-presents varied African manifestations (Dei, 2010) and multi-faceted complex history (Walcott, 2003), which aligns with qualitative research.

The discursive frameworks adopted suggest contextualized qualitative, subjective, and sound participant-informed approaches as opposed to traditional methods that may not access the contours of Black youth meaning-making. I followed the applied research approach of Tilliotson and McDougal (2013), who noted that Eurocentric research is partial and self-serving despite claims of scientific objectivity because every race has its unique concerns. They added; "pointed rhetoric has yet to unseat the entrenched anti-egalitarian frameworks that exist in majoritarian systems" (Tilliotson & McDougal, 2013, p. 102). "Every way of knowing is clouded by some uncertainty about the social and natural worlds. There is power not to know" (Dei, 2011, p. 6). James et al. (2010) recognized they did not have the answers, and focused on deep listening, talking with, and talking back to the community for answers. Research with indigenous knowers

emphasizes approaches that enable physical, social, and spiritual inquiry (Dei, 2011). The Afrocentric methodology is wholistic and integrative and it offered promise for richer understanding through culturally immersive participatory research.

Recruitment Process

The context for recruitment was purposive sampling (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996) with a focus on marginalized Black African youth (Dei & Rummens, 2013) who face many subtle forms of racism (Kubilene et al., 2014). Studies show high numbers of new youth to Canada do not complete high school-as high as 74% in some jurisdictions compared to the mainstream average at 12% to 25% (James et al., 2010). Black youth are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice and child welfare system (Oba, 2013). Given these concerns, it is hardly surprising that Cauce, Ryan, and Grove, (1998) decried the paucity of research on Black youth. Opponents of Afrocentric schools decried the idea as regressive and a movement away from integration (Dragnea & Erling, 2008). Therefore, this study specifically sought to engage youth with lived experience to understand how integrated they feel within the public-school system. We did not rely on parent reports. Foreign-trained parents may not have first-hand experience. This, required a purposive sampling method (Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, (2000), as one of the study's goals is to make audible the African youth voice. The Participants were therefore purposefully selected based on these criteria:

Black African youth as used in this paper refers to those born to Children of Black parent(s) who self-identify as being of African origin regardless of where they were born This excludes White African youth because of the specific focus of the dissertation study, it however does not signify that Africans are a homogenous group as the continent comprises 53 unique nations.

Youth Criteria

The inclusion criteria for youth selected to participate in this study were the following

- Black African youth of African descent;
- Aged 16 to 24;
- Currently, live in Waterloo region;
- Have completed at least two years schooling in Waterloo region at any level;
- Are “information rich” regarding experiences of alienation of Black Youth
- Are willing to talk as shown by their willingness to participate in the research; and
- Are demographically representative (nationalities, gender, age, education).

I examined individual positionality and the context of their unique stories with utmost respect as recommended by Strauss & Corbin (1990). Recognizing the contextual nature of qualitative research, the views of the youth in this sample are not generalizable to all. However, the study provides a platform from which pointers to further work that needs to be done in the areas of internationalizing and indigenizing public school education in smaller communities.

Youth meeting the selected criteria possess common attributes that make them valuable sources of information, but the sample was by no means homogenous as they were drawn from various African countries and social strata. The focus was on achieving a purposive sample that represents the region’s diverse Black African youth. I experienced some hardships in recruiting minority groups for research, such as exploitation, distrust, stigmatizing communities, deficit focus, and abuse of findings (Norton & Manson, 1996), and I speak to that later in this paper. It was important to recognize youth and elders as equal knowledge co-producers (Dei, 2011; James et al., 2010; Kumsa et al., 2014) and to recruit respectfully and with sensitivity.

Elders Recruitment

Elders are resource persons or opinion leaders in the community based on status; age; cultural, spiritual, or academic knowledge; or other valued attributes. Traditionally in Africa, elders serve as custodians of values that are passed on orally to the next generation. There is a recognition that knowledge comes not from individual acumen but from collective knowing (Asante, 2003; Dei, 2000, 2010, 2011) as demonstrated by the proverb, *“It is by listening to the people that the elder is considered wise”* (Nigerian proverb, n.d.). Elders, by being on earth longer, are believed to have learned from other people, life experiences, travails, and triumphs. Although age is not the only determinant, it is significant because older people are believed to have added perspectives due to proximity to the ancestors. The proverb, *“the child who knows how to wash their hands will eat with the elders”* (Nigerian proverb, n.d.) extols the importance of personal attributes, discipline, or skills. The town crier was known in traditional Nigerian society as the custodian of the praise chants (popular among the Yoruba tribe in Western Nigeria) for different families. These chants chronicled the contributions of the family and thus the crier was a curator of ancestry. Maturity, status, and community activism also qualify as personified by the young people who served as elders and connectors in this study.

Elders were recruited through a variant of the “expert sampling” strategy. This nomenclature is misleading as the elders are not experts in issues impacting Black youth or all African matters as Africa is a continent of 53 countries with diverse languages, cultures, religions, and customs. However, the expert sampling technique enables researchers to select purposefully, and in this case selecting elders proceeded cautiously out of consideration for the generation gap and differences in experiences among seemingly homogenous groups. I needed to select elders who are comfortable engaging youth but also self-aware and reflective of their own journeys as immigrants navigating dual nationalities and cultures. I therefore, selected elders

who understood the emphasis on mutual respect and learning using these parameters. In honour of African communal ethos, two elders co-facilitated the youth dialogue with me. To recognize their input and solidarity as co-knowledge creators, I use “we” in this chapter when I refer to specific steps in the research process that were taken in conjunction with the elders. This honours their generosity of spirit in giving their time to ensure the cultural safety and trustworthiness of the research in meaningful authentic ways for the youth participants.

Elders’ Criteria

- Embody Afrocentric perspective and unique expertise that enhance exploratory processes
- Understand the research purpose and objectives and are willing to trust the process;
- Have lived in Kitchener-Waterloo area for at least three years; and are African leaders of thought who think critically about race issues

The elders were selected for their knowledge, attitudes, skills, and interest and were given details of the research in person to enable them to make informed decision about their involvement. Dlamini, Wolfe, Anucha & Yan (2009, p.409) distinguish between “being black” and “becoming black” and it was important to assess how politicized these elders were about blackness. Through ongoing interactions, I answered questions about the research purpose and got a sense of their ideas about the research focus. The mutual process of engagement enhanced the understanding of elders and their sustained interest in the research project and participation as facilitators of the dialogue forum. Three of the interested elders were selected based on availability and I met with them individually to further explain what their facilitator role would entail. We met as an elder team to review the research design and receive their inputs. I gained valuable insights from the participant recruitment process, both within and outside my community.

Recruitment Challenges

I solicited the assistance of the Multicultural Center, the Reception House for Newcomers, the Waterloo Region immigration network, Pathways for Youth, Lutherwood CODA, counseling centers, churches, mosques, community centers, and other youth-serving agencies. I briefed them on the proposed research design, goals, and purpose and suggested roles they could play in participant recruitment while gauging the pulse of practitioners and the community about the research study.

Nuanced Methodology-linked Insights

Despite these connections, I faced challenges as staff assumed gate-keeping roles and denied access to youth in their programs even though they tacitly agreed we need to understand the experiences of the youth to meet their needs. They requested fliers, consent letters, and other recruitment material which was promptly delivered to them but ultimately denied me access to the youth through various mechanisms. For example, Pathways for Youth initially consented to my attending on a program night to announce and invite youth to participate in the study, but later, sent an email advising that school board policies prohibit contact with youth in the program for research purposes.

Stachel (2012) cautioned that treating all immigrants the same disadvantages visible minority children and recommended that the Pathways program hire cultural staff who would be capable of meaningfully engaging their large Somali youth group. I contacted staff at Pathways for assistance with youth recruitment precisely because they have a large proportion of African refugee youth. Youth eligibility for pathways programs are based on criteria such as involvement with child welfare, attendance issues, low-income status and subsidized housing or residence in certain neighbourhood which are then classified as “risk factors”. The staff upon being provided

with recruitment material and background information about the focus of the study became unwilling to grant me, a Black African researcher access to the Black youth. Anxiously they questioned what I would ask the youth and I provided all relevant information including the university's research ethics approval, my instruments, and rationale for the age 16 to 24 criteria but was still denied access to the youth by being told it is the school board's policy even though that policy was never mentioned until they realized the topic was related to the youth experiences of alienation. This was very telling especially because the coordinators were unable to confirm whether they had implemented recommendations made by the previous researcher who decried the program's lack of cultural relevance.

In addition, I contacted a large youth-serving organization that provides mental health assessments, social supports and open custody youth opportunities and I was surprised to learn there were no Black students in the program. Given the high representation of Black youth in prison and in the foster care system, I sought to recruit Black youth involved in this agency to understand their perspective of schooling and impact of early interventions, assessments and preventive approaches that may benefit Black African youth. I theorized that alternative school options can help them stay out of the criminal justice system and attain life goals through access to supports, resources, and supports, but alas there were no Black youth there. The staff denied that systemic factors were at play in eligibility considerations that determine who gets access to preventive assessments and treatments versus those who are deemed worthy of harsh punishment for similar behaviours. The staff showed lack of knowledge and ability to question why Black youth are not referred by schools for the assessments and mental health supports that their White counterparts enjoy. They maintained that they serve everyone who is referred by the appropriate sources but when challenged, had to admit that the alternative for Black youth would be jail. The

implication is that their White peers enjoy alternative preventive diversion programs that enable them to remain educationally engaged, receive treatment and or support services, thus avoiding involvement with the criminal justice system. The differential treatment by non-critical thinking gatekeepers portends adverse life trajectories for the Black youth. Education is directly linked to employability, income, and status. These social determinants inform access to and quality of health care for the youth and their families. The human, social and economic costs of these complex intersections have yet to be studied, understood or acknowledged. This is therefore a very valuable contribution to the literature in terms of the linkages between race, politics of representation, the identity of helping professionals and systemic erosion of the social determinants and contributions to their health and wellbeing.

Africa, my Africa, to thee I Turn

Given the challenges of recruiting participants through Pathways which attracts African youth deemed “at risk” and Luther wood early intervention program, I focused on personal connections in the African and Black community. The African Canadian Association of Waterloo region is a registered charity and umbrella association serving all Africans in the Region. To mitigate challenges for Black African children who are underserved in the school system, the association provides after-school homework support to them. Ethnocultural groups and African leaders of thought concerned about the plight of the youth built on this foundation to design programmatic interventions such as the African Community Wellness Initiative (ACWII) which runs community gardens and provides summer employment for youth interns. Similarly, my Community Academic Reciprocal Engagement (CARE) social innovation laboratory focuses on youth research and positive engagement in school and society. I provided information on the

research design for my dissertation research to key contacts and received support for recruiting participants from the various ethnic groups by going through trusted community leaders.

This was a positive thing as successful community research partnership can facilitate effective knowledge mobilization within the African community and its collaborators and partners. Established traditions of collectivity in African community means personal contact and interactions are highly valued, therefore word-of-mouth and in-person conversations (James et al., 2010) were important in the recruitment process. These tools led to a web of connections, for example, an African youth connected me with a pastor from his ethnic group which gave me access to their church and the soccer group which meets there. This youth's remarkable story of putting himself through high school and university after suffering war trauma and personal bereavement made him a respected role model in his community. Key contact persons and inspirational leaders such as this youth, pastors and imams were instrumental in helping me gain access to a wide representation of youth for this dissertation research study.

I recruited a total of seventeen youth through self and family referrals, community nominations from key African and Black contacts, supplemented by emails, phone calls, posters, and visits. A snowball process also ensued whereby some youth identified friends they wanted to participate with. Youth who were already engaged were effective recruiters and it was easier for youth to attend if they had a friend who was also attending. This is important to note in doing research with marginalized youth who might otherwise be unsafe or have their voices and views sidelined. There is safety in numbers for marginalized people, although coming together for support is often repudiated as their fear is invalidated (Tatum, 1997).

Recruiting from the African community was not without challenges as some parents insisted on first meeting me or having the research conducted in their homes. The selected age

bracket meant participants were able to provide informed consent without parental consent, but many parents were involved because they were protective, had a lack of comfort with the system, the children depended on them for transportation, or they had perceptions about Canadian youth independence from which they actively shielded their offspring. A major reason for choosing this age group is their ability to reflect verbally on their involvement at primary, secondary, or tertiary education levels. I agreed to attend the homes to explain the study to parents as needed and conducted most of the storying sessions in the homes for the comfort and safety of the youth and their parents. The parents relaxed with me after being briefed on the study objectives. Some youth were wary of getting in trouble with the system and others felt unqualified to participate in education research. The parent-child dynamics I observed in these visits struck me as vastly different from media portrayal of uninvolved or absent parents. I assured parents and youth that I was no agent of the state, and armed with signed consent forms, I negotiated drives for the youth to the Elder-Facilitated Youth Dialogue, assuring parents of their children's safety.

The implication of this was that although the individual storytelling sessions were designed to be held after the group dialogue, in some cases they preceded the dialogue due to parental insistence on meeting first to understand what their children would be asked. This process resulted in longer and more frequent engagement with the youth than I had envisaged (to sign consents, meet parents, conduct storytelling interviews, and during the dialogue forum). It was, however, very beneficial and I got used to letting the participants drive the process, while I took meticulous notes about deviations from the plan, observations of parent-child interactions, and other information that I may have missed if we had met in coffee shops.

The fear of parents that children may be in trouble or that the system might be up to something was palpable and required time and sensitivity to diffuse. As a former child welfare

worker, I was aware that in some circles, ethnic minority professionals are considered traitors who betray their communities. I understood my role as a researcher could be viewed as acting on behalf of the state and worked hard to mitigate this. I was also aware that parents and youth who feel safe would express themselves more freely and my results might differ from other studies. Parents expressed fears and worries about systemic coercion of children and labeling them as angry if they questioned the research motives. Their views about research and academia were based on very real experiences but in the end, it was gratifying to hear them express gratitude for the research process, respect, time, validation, and attention.

Youth Dilemma and Peculiarities

Once I had a critical mass of potential participants, we brainstormed dates. It was hard to find a day that worked for all the youth as many are precariously employed, and work shifts that established adult workers avoid. Their hours and shifts change at the whim of their employers. As young, irregular workers, whose hours are increased or slashed frequently and arbitrarily, they are more willing to take whatever they get to avoid giving employers reasons to cut their hours. Many of the youth were also involved in after-hours extracurricular activities including sports, community service, or religious activities and are very resourceful considering the myriad factors outside their control. Through a process of phone and in-person consultations with the youth, they suggested that weekends would work best as those who work weekends felt they could trade their shifts if they gave enough notice. No single weekday worked for all the youth, so I recognized that not everyone would be able to attend on any day and we had better chances of getting more youth on a weekend due to greater parent availability for drives. This was anxiety-invoking as it was impossible to determine exactly how many would attend or when they would get their shifts, and I confronted the stark reality of youth research engagement. After

extensive consultations, we scheduled the inter-generational dialogue for a Saturday at 10:30 am, recognizing the propensity of youth to sleep in on Saturdays but also allowing for mosque attendance on Friday or church worship service on Sunday with family.

As the day drew near, I called all the youth, sent emails, left messages and many could not be reached in the penultimate days. I became anxious and began combing all my community contacts for participants including Professor Kewee Kumsa, a highly respected African scholar with great experience doing research with African youth in the region, helped me out. She made personal calls and her incredible support enabled me to recruit two more youth for the study, bringing to seventeen the total number of youth who participated in this study, providing a rich understanding of their experiences.

Data Collection

Triangulated Qualitative Methods

Elder-facilitated youth dialogue;

In-depth individual life stories and

Reflective journaling

Combining the three methods listed above enabled access to varied levels and depths of knowledge that would not be available through any one method alone. For instance, participants telling their in-depth life stories in the comfort of their homes were able to share hurts and pain they could not share in the intergenerational forum. They also accessed raw emotions in the privacy of the in-depth interviews. Seeing the youth in different contexts (at home, in the presence of elders, and peers) also enabled me, the researcher, to contextualize what I was hearing from the youth. For instance, the interviews gave context to the words the youth shared

in the group. Race, class, neighbourhood, parents' education, and work etc. expressed immense gratitude for her parents' sacrifices in her home; I understood where her feelings of appreciation emanated from. I had first met this young girl in the after-school homework club run by the African association at a time when they lived in a subsidized housing complex. By the time of this research many years later, they had moved into their own home in a new subdivision.

Elder Facilitated Youth Dialogue (EFYD) Methodology.

This study sought to understand what is happening to youth at school, which interest to parents, schools, the justice system, tertiary institutions, employers, and others. In African traditions, fluid roles permit meaningful interactions when Western norms do not supplant inter-generational engagement. The process offered mutual validation and cultural appreciation.

Upon commencement of the dialogue, participants were seated in a circle and I reviewed the following with all participants:

- Consent form, confidentiality, goals, uses, storage, and disposal of data
- Logistical information (duration of group, location of washroom/water fountain)

Participants were asked to sign and submit the consent form to the researchers (after reviewing with the group), and discuss as a group the research questions posed on their school experiences. Through the dialogue session, the youth educated the elders, (including me as a researcher and parent) about their experiences with teachers, the curriculum, administrators, peers, and the school climate. The elders who had been well trained recognized the need for humility, active reflective listening, and gratitude for the gift of the youth voices. This aligns with African reciprocal worldview where all things are connected, and knowledge is found in God and everything human and inanimate. With the elders' cooperation, I was able to create an engaging, stimulating, affirming environment through participatory strategies described below.

EFYD Participatory Strategies

Venue: The EFYD session was held in the Faculty of Social Work in downtown Kitchener for reasons of accessibility, closeness to public transit, Saturday hours, and familiarity to most participants. Efforts were made to ensure it was safe through the following strategies.

Ambience: An African ambience was created using African wrappers and fabrics as backdrops and decoration in the group sessions and on the tables.

African music and audiovisuals: African Diaspora decolonizing music immediately communicated to the youth that this was a space for talking about oppression, power, justice, and human rights from an African perspective. Furthermore, video clips of African youth were shown at the beginning to welcome youth into the space and set the stage for what was coming. One of the clips showed Muslim Black African girls in Australia defying the odds to compete in sports despite religious and cultural challenges in a predominantly white country.

Perspective-taking: It was important that every aspect of the EFYD was done from the perspective of the youth. To achieve this, the elders carried out an exercise writing to their younger selves and writing the letter they believe their child would write to them if asked to express how the session should go. This was powerful in helping the elders step outside themselves and gain empathy. The elders were able to select clips that reflect varied issues pertinent to youth to ensure the youth felt safe to talk and share without judgment, demonstrating that this was not a space of denial but of acknowledgment of challenges they face. It was also important to convey to them that this was not about the elders but about youth ideas. It was not a lecture about academic success or desires of parents for youth but simply about the experience of being a black youth in a Western society.

This message was further communicated to the youth by the elders taking on the role of cooking, serving, and ministering to the needs of the youth to further reinforce that this was about them. The preambles and housekeeping discussions also highlighted this important message.

Icebreaker: The icebreaker further helped to put the youth at ease, to reclaim space at the Faculty of Social Work as an African space, for that day and made youth to feel grounded. In the spirit of confidentiality, names were not used. Wanting youth to feel comfortable, I had each one pick an item from a basket filled with African themed items (craft materials, books, souvenirs, decorations, fabrics, and pictures) and speak about why it appealed to them and its cultural relevance to them in their journey as Blacks in Canada.

African meal: To continue the mood created by the music, the icebreaker, and the room décor, we broke bread, using African food to promote feelings of mutuality, fellowship, and relaxation. A native Nigerian proverb says *he who shares your oil and pepper cannot betray you*, referring to the trust and mutuality that eating together promotes. In this context, a shared meal does not refer to eating out. Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, author of “Things Fall Apart” is often quoted as saying we do not invite friends to come and dine because they have no food in their homes, it is for fellowship. Eating together involved sharing personal space and food thus creating camaraderie. We connected and intersected around the table and this afforded opportunity to reflect together based on intersecting identities, similarities, and differences.

Steps and procedures: I was up bright and early to cook “jollof rice”, an African rice dish eaten across the continent and made popular by Ghanaians and Nigerians. The elders supplied the music, African table covers, and video clips. Two elders were at the venue early to set up and met youth on arrival with the sound of African Diaspora music.

To enable the youth to realize the African-centered focus, clips, African proverbs, and imagery were employed by the elders at the beginning of the dialogue session to set the stage for candid discussions about race, blackness, education, expectations, belonging, acceptance, and discrimination. I conferred with the two elders who were supporting me and decided to start with a general session for the welcome, procedural, and evocative activities before breaking into two smaller dialogue process groups: 1) ages 16 to 18 and 2) ages 19 to 24. In this session, youth answered questions posed in the dialogue guide as a group (see Appendix C).

An elder facilitated each of the dialogue groups using the prompt questions; I had designed while I floated between the two ensuring ethical processes were being followed and that the digital recorders and laptop recording apps set up in each room were functioning. The ensuing discussions were recorded on both recording devices for transcription and analysis.

At the end of the session, all participants gathered for lunch, during which they received \$10 gift certificates and further information about next steps, including member checking and information about participating in knowledge dissemination presentations. The youth also helped to present each elder with a "dashiki" top in appreciation for their help.

I passed out referral resources and brochures, explaining that youth who may have been triggered in any way by participating in the dialogue could receive supports such as counseling and other supports.

The youth thanked the elders for facilitating their coming together to discuss issues that impact their lives and during the debrief they expressed a desire to do something about the issues that impact them. This view that was echoed by the parents and the elders who were touched by the youth experiences they were privileged to witness. I explained that the follow-up in-depth life stories with available youth would provide further avenues to continue the exploration.

Storytelling: Adaptation of the Interview Method

Yin (2009) describes qualitative research as adaptive. The life story and interview methods were adapted for use with traditional African folklore practices. The talking drum usually invites each to tell their story; it beckons, welcomes, and heralds all into a space of connecting, healing, and building. The drum sets the tone for the gathering. It respects all stories: joy or sadness, celebration, or grief. Ceremonies mark every stage of the African life cycle. When a child is born, often the elders name the child in elaborate ceremonies witnessed by the extended family amidst stories about their ancestors. The youth forum facilitated the development of a guide for in-depth stories from seven youth who were asked to reflect deeply upon their experiences, their meaning-making, and the things they heard from their peers during the inter-generational dialogue.

Participants tapped into their pain and anger as well as hopes and aspirations. The stories revealed thoughts about change and possible roles as change catalysts. They were able to outline topics and plans for making visible their experiences and ideas to potential allies, teachers, social workers, peers, and the community. The following procedures were relied upon to enable participants to reflect upon their experiences using the in-depth follow-up conversations:

- I called to remind the youth of our appointments and speak with any significant others involved in the youth decision-making.
- I met the youth at the designated time and place (mostly in their homes), conducted introductions as needed, and once seated, I thanked them for their participation.
- I reviewed the research purpose and the process, and asked if they had questions
- I reiterated that they could discontinue or choose to not answer any question at any time, reviewed the confidentiality clause and reminded them of counseling supports available.

- Using prompts and an interview guide developed from the EFYD we conversed about their school experiences. I listened, requesting clarifications or elaborations as needed.
- I kept the story narrative style, so it was open, fluid, and unstructured to enable each storyteller to create their own story as they needed to.

Nonetheless, I kept the main research question and the purpose of the study in focus and made sure I reframed or asked the questions enumerated earlier in different formats if at first, they were not answered or needed to be elaborated upon. I did this to fully explore and understand their experiences of being Black learners in Waterloo region schools. I also wanted to learn how this differed from their experiences in other places if they had schooled elsewhere in Canada or outside Canada, such as their country of origin. I used follow-up questions to probe into their relationships, social work, family relations and support networks as well as connections to African community, language, culture, customs. The youth also discussed their hopes and aspirations and provided suggestions about what should be done differently, mainly pleading for Black teachers in their schools.

Stories were used in this study to shed light on systems and structures that impact Black youth at school. This was refreshingly different as stories demonizing Black people are often presented as objective, neutral, and devoid of context. The stories in this research highlight the context and perspectives of the youth. We created space for co-created stories that honor and respect their voices by encouraging their reflections. For too long there has been a huge disconnect between the worldview of Black people and researchers who superimpose their ideas about what counts as knowledge, who creates it, and who consumes it. This represents the point of departure of this study from research that focuses on “success factors” for Black youth, which

is a euphemism for assessing how well Black youth conform to whiteness (Ogbu, 1970). The youth as knowledge producers told stories of success but also of failure, hurt, pain, grief, and joy.

The counter stories in this study explore how Black African youth interrogate the source, meaning, reliability, and inclusivity of the schooling they are subjected to. The stories depict how Black African youth conceptualize culturally validating curriculum, how they see themselves within the school system, as well as how they are seen. The Afrocentric lens used in the study enhanced their self-perception as agents of social change. We assured them that the focus was not on Eurocentric notions of success, as that created feelings of not being worthy in some youth and we did not want to short-circuit their meaning-making process through imposed definitions and messages of inadequacy.

The process - there were two types of questions in the conversational storytelling protocol. The primary research questions were not actually asked of the participants but were the main issues I sought answers to as a researcher. The questions or prompts were based on and facilitated answering the primary research questions; they illuminated the primary research question, which is broad and overarching. The questions were specific but broad enough to assist in answering the main research question. Like most qualitative studies that use interviews, the protocol helped to develop a semi-structured guide that was used to prompt participants to tell their stories.

In addition to the general questions asked of all participants, they were asked specific questions directly related to their responses in order to understand, clarify, or elaborate on answers already given. In the introductory questions, I was mostly interested in knowing how the youth self-identify. How would they describe themselves or present to a total stranger? Next, I asked questions about their family composition. The next set of questions explored

school relations, their experiences with teachers, administrators, staff, curriculum, policies, rules, punishment, rewards, etc. To examine these issues further I used interrelated questions to elicit discussions about their experiences, identity, and meanings. I explored their sense of belonging, friendships, relations with peers, ease of making friends, and how included they felt at school. In the individual sessions, I explored their friendships, how they are formed, the level of input in deciding what they do with their friends, social linkages outside the school, and their friendships outside the ethnic groups. Through these questions, I was able to gain understanding of their experiences of alienation, belonging, and authentic interactions. The oral stories were based on the guide developed through the focus group, which enabled probing participant responses to issues raised in the group. Participants also reflected on the introduction of Afrocentric clips and ideas by the elders during the group dialogue. I sought to tap into participant hopes for change and social transformation and was flexible with the interviews in order to capture each person's truth and standpoints (Lee, McGrath, Moffat, & George, 2002).

Design in qualitative interviewing is iterative. That means each time you repeat the process of gathering information, analyzing, winnowing, and testing it, you come closer to a clear and convincing model of the phenomenon you are studying...the continuous nature of qualitative interviewing means that the questioning is redesigned throughout the project (Rubin, & Rubin, 2011). The questions evolved from the first interviews, were broadened by the dialogue session and I even found myself questioning my questions when I came to analyze the responses.

Qualitative interviewing is "flexible, iterative, and continuous, rather than prepared, in advance and locked in stone" (Rubin & Babbie, 1995, p. 43). Patton (1990) outlined three types of qualitative, open-ended interviews; all three were employed in this conversational storytelling dialogue adapted for youth engagement.

Engagement strategies - In-depth storytelling sessions were conducted with six of the youth. Although originally planned to last for one hour, most lasted between one and a half to two hours and one went well over two hours as there were often a lot of emotions in the sessions. This interactive story-creation was participatory and empowering. Munhall (1988) recommends continuous assessment of participants' consent throughout the lifespan of the research, when and if there is a lengthy period of engagement. This feminist idea is also consistent with Afrocentric ideas whereby the human engagement process is as important as documented consent on paper. When participants got emotional, I offered to stop entirely or continue another day, but their desire to continue and their expressions of both pain and relief at being able to express pent-up feelings prevailed. The teary eyed youth said they are never asked these questions and they often felt their opinions did not matter. One respondent indicated she was shedding tears of joy, because she could finally see that society is wrong for "hating me just because of my skin." It was very important to respect youth views and to avoid reproducing oppressive research practices that perpetuate abuse of power. I was mindful that during recruitment, many youth and parents displayed mistrust of the research process and some believed their voices do not matter or that the research would only be about those succeeding at school. I therefore employed strategies to promote trust in the process:

- Validate participants and parent concerns where applicable;
- Go with or through trusted ethnocultural leaders to meet prospective participants;
- Conduct initial meeting with potential participants where they are most comfortable, e.g., in the home rather than in a neutral venue as most parents are wary of the system
- Develop connections, integrity, and respect for the community prior to attempting to conduct research with marginalized populations;

- In addition to personal credibility, affiliate with ethically trustworthy researchers who have demonstrated integrity, cultural sensitivity, and the trust of the community or sub-groups as one researcher will not be familiar with every sub-group and wide representation is important;
- Working with families whom I had previous research contact with proved helpful as they understood my values, motives, and purpose. In other words, research must be grounded in values and ethics, and not just a “flavour of the day”
- Respect and value all connections within the community as many who do not meet the sampling criteria are instrumental in providing leads and vouching for the researcher; and
- Flexibility to listen and adapt the research design is very important for community-based collaborative research.

All conversations were conducted in English as all the participants had adequate levels of schooling in Canada and could converse freely in English. Also, the focus was not on semantics or language structure but on telling their stories. Although I am an African, there is no one African language; Africa is not a country, it is a continent with many countries, each one having many languages and dialects. Where possible, the youth were encouraged to render any information they wanted in their native language as indigenous languages are rich in proverbs, ideologies, worldviews, and distilled wisdom. Many of the youth, however, did not have a connection to those languages and some lamented the absence of their grandmothers who remain the carriers of tradition and wisdom from folklores and stories. Africans are known for proverbs, music, oratory, and other art metaphors that convey meanings too hard to put in words.

Data Analysis

Based on Afrocentric ideology concepts of wholeness and interconnectedness, the data was analyzed in an ongoing manner throughout the research without waiting for a demarcated and separate data analysis stage. Data collection, analysis, and research design occurred in an ongoing, reflexive relationship. I kept a field journal throughout the research and documented the processes. As Afrocentric research methodologies are still evolving, I proceeded intuitively using an iterative process that can enable theory development about culturally informed research through introspection and critical self-reflection. I hired professional transcribers to transcribe the data and analyzed the data across demographic categories. I identified themes that I saw in the data and used descriptive codes to name the themes, to distinguish them from other related themes. The next stage was moving from coding (seeing) into encoding, i.e., “seeing as” (Paton, 2002) by grouping the descriptive codes into interpretative concepts that illustrated the interactions and associations between the codes. This process moved beyond descriptive patterns, transcended analytical codes, and moved into reflexive elucidation through processes of interpretation, self-awareness, and reflection. I went back and forth with the literature to see how what I was finding compared to earlier studies. As some of the studies were not conducted in Canada, I began to theorize about factors responsible for the similarities and differences.

The triangulated methods of this study added depth, illumination, and the richness that quantitative surveys and questionnaires may obscure. I was aware that, as a researcher, I am also a research instrument as the “subjective I” in relation to the research and participants as what I transcribe, transcribes me. The instrument can change the data, my choice of topic is political, and I am involved with it. I recognize that it is not just my writing that will be read, but readers will read me through what I write. I engaged in introspection and retrospection, recognizing the

twin tasks of letting the story speak for itself through the youth directing the evolution of their stories and providing a sensitive analytic rendition that aids meaning-making without usurping participant voices or their own interpretations of their experiences (Caragata, 2005).

I analyzed the transcribed data inductively, paying attention to the inter-generational contexts, power differentials, and social location of participants in extrapolating meanings from the data. Recognition of the fact that issues of race are complex and often treated with avoidance (Hampton, 2010; Lindo, 2010) means member checking and layers of review to ensure fidelity of the data is imperative. In African tradition of hospitality and gratitude, the knowledge and wisdom of participants guided how the generous gifts of stories were read, interpreted, and reported. I felt humbled that I would have the decision-making power about what was a worthy theme, or what was worth reporting, or which example best illustrated a theme. As an in-depth study, every voice mattered and needed to be acknowledged. Indeed, an important aspect of indigenous work is making our own knowledge, and feelings known. However, to protect respondent identity, some quotes were combined or disguised and even the pseudonyms were used sparingly. Participant cultural safety was important in reaching decisions about individual comfort level, which is a crucial part in understanding and interpreting the views espoused by participants, when, where, and how. As this research was conducted within a community whose voices and experiences have long been silenced, these considerations were a priority for me in re-presenting youth experiences. In analyzing for themes, I used a generic thematic approach. I colour-coded comments and quotes but also included some quotes under plural themes. I avoided losing anyone's voice and drew on culture and ontological reality of youth during member checking to enable accurate, intimate rendering of their experiences.

All themes and sub-themes emerging from the data as well as field notes are included in the data analysis. My demonstrated group facilitation skills, connections, and respect I enjoy in the community enabled safe, trusting engagement and my emic connections to the issues facilitated layered contextualized explorations. Triangulation of data collection methods enabled obfuscated stories of Black African youth to be told by a Black African researcher whose goal is to honor their perspectives and lived realities. To do this, I captured the procedures, processes, and steps undertaken in this study from my ontological space as a Black African researcher, educator, and mother. Scholarship demonstrates the importance of trusted contacts, e.g. Black pastors, elders, and community builders who can facilitate recruitment, knowledge translation and community mobilization around research gains (Yamatami, Mann, & Wright, 2000).

The wisdom of the elders who supported me was anchored in the humility to learn. James et al. (2010) displayed researcher humility in reporting that they changed through the process: “We ... recognize ... we do not have all the answers, what we are doing is talking 'with' and talking 'back' to our communities” (p. 17). Talking with the data, participants, and my community self, as well as my researcher self in introspective (i.e., sensory, and perceptual) knowledge production, facilitated the analysis.

As colour blindness leads to erasure of identity and perpetuation of subtle covert racism, this study brings race out of the closet in Waterloo region honours African inter-generational connections and promotes collective response to hegemony. Culturally relevant education approaches are most effective if they lead to disrupting taken-for-granted knowledge (Delgado, & Staples, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2005). Research participants wrestle with questions such as what is missing from schools and who benefits from dominant assumptions that underlie notions

of universality and neutrality. Afrocentrism's focus on benefit to Africans aids interrogation of power, meaning-making, analysis, and reporting of findings.

It was important for me as a researcher who is also an insider to examine my personal positioning, social location, power differentials, and sensitivity required for engaging respectfully with participants' intimate stories. My actions were therefore very significant, having potential to impact analysis and the lives of both the interviewer and interviewees (Smith, 1999; Yin, 2016).

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Credibility was achieved by passing the research design through the university's rigorous research ethics process where established scholars and researchers approve only projects meeting well-defined ethical standards. I also subscribe to the Social Work Code of Ethics and incorporated its core values into the research process. This also informed the need to set boundaries between the dissertation study and my social innovation laboratory. In addition, although my community roles enhanced my credibility with families, I was also careful in delineating the boundaries of helper and researcher roles.

Transparency

I was transparent about my social location in relation to the issue, the population, and the methods and reflected on my tensions and struggles as an insider-outsider researcher.

Using evidence

The data analysis enabled me to use evidence from the lives of the participants to buttress points, question existing stereotypes, or advance new concepts and theories that align better with the findings from this study.

Triangulation

The use of different methodological approaches ensured that premature conclusions that fail to consider more complex factors were avoided. The textual data (responses that were given by participants to the interview and focus group guide) from the interviews and youth forum were explored inductively using thematic analysis after multiple readings of the transcripts. Common themes were established by tagging individual responses and matching and placing them into categories based on similar responses to constitute a theme where common themes, ideas, or patterns were discerned

Several levels of open coding were undertaken to arrive at my final categories. I reviewed the initial coding, deliberated upon where specific responses fit best and tried to place responses in units of analysis that would aggregate the themes but still enable individual voices and nuanced responses to be honoured.

Through a wholistic strategy of immersion in the details and complexities of the data to discover the patterns, themes, trends, interconnections, and relationships in the data, I tested the theory, exploring, treading carefully, looking, observing, noting, and documenting. The next step was creatively synthesizing the data and looking at complex interdependencies that could not be reduced to variables or causality. I tried to maintain context sensitivity while identifying transferable elements that could be adapted in new settings, e.g., big communities versus smaller communities and making necessary extrapolations and comparisons. The analysis was aided by Charmaz's (2005) approach; I did initial open coding but also used focused coding, which enhanced my reflectivity and the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. My rigorous training in research as a doctoral student, including obtaining the university's research ethic board approval, provided initial credibility. Triangulation also enhanced credibility by ensuring multiple data sources were utilized to ensure balance, completeness, and staying true to the data.

My emic connections to the issues allowed perspective-taking and flexibility but also called for self-awareness. Having an “inside” understanding of the actor’s definition of a situation is central to understanding the purpose of qualitative inquiry (Ellis, & Bochner, 2000 in Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.)

I used inductive logic, beginning with specific observations and responses and looking for general patterns, themes, and sub-themes as I explored and saw patterns developing: moving back and forth between the tapes, staying true to the data, working from the bottom, regarding each individual participant, not hurrying to find themes or report findings but being wholistically immersed in each of their stories; writing, re-writing, reading, and being read by what I had written as well as what I did not write. Complexities of the real world cannot be simplified easily just by categorizing. For this reason, Patton (2002) cautions against pigeon-holing people or groups through essentialization. Yin (2011) described qualitative research as adaptive, providing the opportunity to choose among many options and I subscribed to that by taking advantage of an emergent arts-based approach and adaptations of traditional qualitative methods. Finding the reason behind the answers each participant gave was the key to gaining full understanding. Each person was situated within their own complex web of immigrant status, nationality, ethnicity, family, school, and society. Use of self is important for the social worker in practice as well as in research to enhance reflective deconstruction.

I communicated authentically through appropriate use of quotes, thoughtfully weaving in stories while maintaining each story’s uniqueness, completeness, and wholeness of all the data. To invite my reader through the lens of the youth, I use the intimate insider first-person voice as well as the narrator storyteller voice. Feminist scholarship emphasizes owning one’s voice and the postmodern approach foster self-questioning and reflectivity (Schwandt, 1997).

This counteracts hegemonic narratives. Elders presented African stories, proverbs, and folklore to mirror non-Eurocentric perspectives and engage the youth in ideological dialogue. According to Hall (1995), an ideology includes “images, concepts, and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand and ‘make sense’ of some aspect of social existence” (p. 18). The underlying ideologies have the potential to foreground Black African youth, but the youth can also articulate their lived realities to the elders, many of whom were not schooled in the region. The goal was to evoke feelings and voices buried by hegemonic discourses that promote race avoidance and denial of racialized people’s lived experiences.

The research design combines storytelling with action-oriented participatory tools, which is an empowering methodology (Wang & Burris, 1997) that aligns epistemologically with African orality. Storytelling is popular in education; it facilitates deep contextual insights (Shams & Robinson, 2005). It contributes to validation and agency for Black youth by promoting action over passivity and acknowledges their perspectives and skills. It is particularly useful in addressing sensitive issues as it can externalize the issues, increase comfort, and enable everyone to take from the stories what they need while co-creating new stories. Storytelling adapts and builds upon indigenous memory-making systems. It enables critical exploration of participants’ views as well as transformation and empowerment through art. By documenting data both orally and in writing it mitigates the relegation or misappropriation of oral histories.

Words and labels

Some youth said they did not experience racism in the school system. As a social worker trained to avoid asking leading questions, I did not want to put words in their mouths and I also needed to clarify and ensure we understood the same things before I could connect beyond the surface level with the youth. Black African youth growing up in Waterloo Region are conditioned to believe there is no racism in the schools. Racism is a bad word in the school system; therefore, not even Black African youth felt free to acknowledge its existence.

Pseudonyms are used and identifying information was removed to protect the identity of the vulnerable youth participants. Demographic information (age, grade, gender, and education) was summarized. To obtain a representative African sample, some of the youth were the only ones from their country of origin as we tried to balance availability, and other youth constraints earlier mentioned. During member checking, I heard both gratitude for the way their words were captured and honored as well as cautiousness among those still in the secondary school system. I therefore removed anything the youth did not want published, aggregating and disguising others in ways that were acceptable by the youth. The agreed-upon findings that resonate with the youth but do not compromise their safety are presented below.

All names of participants are pseudonyms.

Chapter 4: The Findings

Introduction

Racism in the schools was found to be a microcosm of the experiences of Black populations in Waterloo region and the larger society. Participants spoke about issues such as carding, profiling, racial slurs, media portrayals, and lack of representation. The study found that racism pervades the everyday lives of Black youth in Waterloo Region and is prevalent in the education system. Parents and elders involved in the research reported that they fear that racism in the education system will stream their children away from post-secondary education. A desire to resist racism was, therefore, a key motivating factor in their involvement in the Elder Facilitated Youth Dialogue.

Pollack (2003) used focus groups with Black women in prison to tease out counter-narratives and explore structural and systemic issues that individual interviews did not elicit because they tend to reproduce dominant discourses. She chose life history methodology "because of its use in finding out how marginalized people resist and cope with oppression" (p. 464). Dialogue as a participatory, co-created process is effective and valid as a political consciousness-raising tool for socio-political phenomena (Anucha et al., 2006) and this was borne out in the Elder Facilitated Youth Dialogue (EFYD) tool I developed. The insights garnered from both EFYD and the in-depth life story interviews are presented in this chapter in three major themes each with relevant sub-themes. This thematic presentation is not intended to confine the youth voices but to provide an organizational framework that brings clarity to the volume of data collected through the said methods. The three themes that are presented in this chapter are 1) The Colour of Learning in Waterloo region; 2) Effects and manifestations, and 3) Transformation and Triumphs from Travails and Trauma.

The Colour of Education

The schools had Black youth believing that there is no racism in their schools because for the mainstream acknowledging racism necessitates dealing with messy race relations and risking the ire of the white majority. Schools pride themselves on being colour-blind and believe in the notion that policies and rules automatically erase racism as expressed by Moremi:

In our school, there is a rule against racism. You cannot be racist in my school; the school does not allow it"...My school is big on diversity. DIVERSE means Difference, Inclusion, Value, Everybody, Respect, Sincerity, Equality.

As a Black African student who is also a leader in her school, Moremi's words illustrate the strategies of race erasure used by schools in the region. As a member of the school council, she is indoctrinated into and upholds the slogans of the school, probably passing it onto junior students, lacking permission to express her own deeper realities. The school's denial of the existence of racism assumes that shared slogans equate to shared outcomes for all students ignores the unique experience of racialized youth and is proof of unexamined racism.

Other youth echoed similar sentiments, policies and statements professed at school. However, Zik's views are very telling. This male high school student said:

We too have a rule against racism in my school. You cannot be racist; it is not allowed because we are all the same. If you call somebody racist, you will get in trouble. You can't just go, calling people racist. Can you prove it? The White girls will start crying and you better start packing your things, you are the one to get in trouble for calling somebody a bad name.

Zik said racism is not permitted in his school, but even as he repeated received words, he reflected a subconscious struggle to reconciling words with practice by alluding to a fear of being punished for calling out racist behaviour. If a Black youth has the courage to name racism amidst the strong denial of its existence, they are accused of calling others a bad name and the

Black youth bear the burden of proof. Zik asks "can you prove it" reflecting an internal self-talk that silences Black youth by maintaining denial. He wrestles with the school's tendency to support the one exhibiting racist behaviours, particularly if the perpetrators are White and female. Zik, a Black male, said, "the White girls will start crying and... you get in trouble".

Absence of black teachers

One of the most salient findings was that almost all Black African youth in Waterloo Region had never been taught by a Black teacher. This explained why race erasure was able to thrive so well in Waterloo region schools. Colonialism continues to be perpetuated in the school system through White teachers who provide Eurocentric education to all pupils regardless of their heritage and historical relationship to what is taught. The youth are hindered from accessing indigenous, decolonized education that incorporates and values multiple intelligences or ways of knowing, by being denied the opportunity of having teachers who look like them and can make education relatable. It may be argued that White teachers can also impart decolonized knowledge with training but even if they did, the children would receive conflicting messages as the reality at school suggested Blacks belong in the lower echelons and cannot be knowledge producers as noted by Ebony, a female participant:

In my school, there is one Black person and she is in the café. That is all! I have never had a Black teacher – period.

It was not only Ebony who said she had never been taught by a Black teacher, but her comments came with a note of finality and helplessness to do anything about it. Having Black teachers appeared to be something she and some of the other participants could hardly conceive because modern-day slavery and hierarchical arrangements were normalized. Participants said the few Black people they saw worked as bus drivers or in the cafeteria. All but two of the youth

in this study have never had a Black teacher, and they appeared to accept that it is just the norm because they only saw White teachers or administrators. In the absence of Black adults in the schools, it is hardly farfetched for Black youth to consider themselves out of place or as having little chance of succeeding. In the ensuing discussions, the youth tried to make meaning of their experiences

Obafemi, a high school male participant, assumed Black teachers are not hired because they are not qualified to teach in Canada. This was evident when he said:

But maybe they are not qualified. They have to go to school to become teachers then they can teach. Canada cannot take anybody and put in a class to start teaching their children. You cannot come and straightway wanna teach. They must train; have the quality and knowledge to give to students because this is Canada.

This young person was attempting to make sense of glaring injustice of absencing Blacks from the teaching and administrative cadre as he opined that Black people may not be qualified to teach in Canada. This refrain is known to foreign-trained professionals as Canadian knowledge is legitimized and others are devalued. He implied that Blacks may have an inferior ability. By excluding Blacks, not only is their qualification devalued, the exclusion begins to inform received knowledge about Blacks and their abilities. Obafemi admonished that Blacks cannot just expect to be allowed to teach straightaway, arguing that "this is Canada" thus the power of the dominant to define what is knowledge becomes the very tool for normalizing discrimination. The value of Black teachers' experience, international exposure, and other skills are minimized and by extension so is their very humanity.

Queen Amina, a female undergraduate, however disagreed with this line of reasoning and argued that Blacks are denied opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities

My aunt is a teacher. She is double qualified. Here, she went to school again to do Canadian training but still they would not give her work. One day my parents were saying I copy Canada accent, then my aunt said "leave her alone, let her copy their accent. That way she will get a job, not like me who cannot get a job because I have an African accent." Now, she got substitute teacher job in Guelph, but not in Kitchener-Waterloo.

Queen Amina who is a university undergraduate also disagreed that there are no Blacks qualified to teach in the schools, her exposure both in her university and within her family appeared to make a difference in her perception of the issue. Relying on the experience of her aunt who had attended teachers' college in Canada and was still unable to find employment in Waterloo region, she shifted from mainstream dogma about inferior qualifications or ability to questioning flawed assumptions in the school system. It is easy to de-historicize the conversation by starting from Black teachers are not qualified or Black youth are lazy and non-cerebral without looking at the root causes. She was however not the only one, others also narrated how their family members toiled as factory labour, personal support workers. Hegemonic discourses contradicted their lived realities and resulted in a spirited challenge from Adaobi:

Asking for Canadian experience, that is discrimination! Where will they get it? Many Black teachers finish training in Canada but no jobs. Accent should not be the focus because many students have accents too but is the school only for white children? At least you can have one or two Black teachers also since there are Black students too in the school.

Adaobi, not only decried the situation, she was emboldened to give alternative opinions rather than merely echoing school proclamations. Adaobi suggested hiring of one or two teachers to meet the needs of Black learners showing an ability to question the status quo.

Maya, a female participant was more cautious, calling attention to the fact that the system can marginalize Black teachers even if their bodies gain access:

When you are a supply teacher, it's hard, but you have to do it first before you can get a real job. Students feel you are not a real teacher. I had a Black substitute teacher, she was nice, but the students tried to take advantage of her. They do that to all substitute teachers, but why do Black teachers always be substitutes, never real teachers.

Maya disagreed that the absence of Black teachers reflected low qualifications but noted that their position as substitute teachers renders them vulnerable. Maya analyzed implications of having Blacks always in temporary substitute positions which conveys to students their inferiority as disposable stop-gaps for "real" teachers. She notes that students may try to erode any substitute teacher's authority, but as Black teachers are always in substitute positions without their own classrooms or attendant power, they are on the receiving end more often.

Talking about the plight of Black teachers, Kwame, a male respondent placed the responsibility on the school administrators saying:

It is the White principal deciding who can teach and they already believe the Black teacher cannot teach. If I am a principal I will hire Black teachers.

In these words, Kwame demonstrated insight into the cause of the phenomenon, he named race as a factor in hiring decisions, noting the obvious fact that Whites do the hiring and Blacks are not hired except in very rare cases as substitute teachers. He calls them "Black teachers" signifying that to him, they are teachers regardless of whether the system permits them to teach or deems them incapable of teaching. He also interrogated power by highlighting how administrator beliefs influence hiring decisions. Kwame, a recent high school graduate, asserted "if I am a principal, I will hire Black teachers", envisioning himself as a change agent.

It is clear what these youth want, what they wish they could do and would do if given the opportunity to change their schools. The more the youth probed the issues, initially repressed views found expression. They problematized the non- hiring of Black teachers in Waterloo region in the context of the group dialogue. Many stories were told of friends, acquaintances, and family who volunteered and applied for years but only got teaching jobs if they moved to other cities like Guelph, Brampton, Mississauga, or Toronto. Members engaged in intense debate and deconstructed hegemonic discourses.

Demonstrating personal resonance with the issue and the efficacy of the dialogic method to promote mirroring and reflection, Adaobi spoke of how it disadvantages them specifically.

Black teachers have to move away from Kitchener-Waterloo to get jobs so even the Black kids over there have an advantage over us who have never had a Black teacher. Schools should recognize there are many countries represented in the school, but they think the school is for white students only and, the attitude is, if you are not white, then it is "take it or leave it."

This was no longer a general issue; Adaobi recognized that the education of Black youth in Waterloo region is impacted negatively as their counterparts in other jurisdictions are advantaged by having teachers that look like them and seeing their realities reinforced at school. She specifically noted that the schools unduly privilege White students, expressing a feeling of relative deprivation by virtue of schooling in Waterloo region. When youth are deprived space to verbalize their oppression, they may find ways of disrupting teachers and practices that scorn them but then may be forced to leave or acquiesce if the system is not open to change.

Youth are still negotiating their identities and their school experiences can contribute negatively to their developmental evolution. Miriam said categorically that having Black or coloured teachers would make a difference to her:

If I have a Black teacher, I will be proud to say, "See, my teacher is from Ghana or Jamaica." I mean, if a Black person is a teacher, not just cleaner or bus driver.

Miriam was one of the first to speak at the beginning of the forum, saying there was no racism in her school but at this point, she said she would be proud to have Black teachers. This shows that they felt stigmatized to only see Blacks in the cafeteria. The exclusionary hiring practices and politics of representation affect the youth as it reinforces beliefs that Black people and the knowledge they possess are not valued.

Mandela a recent university graduate working part time while seeking full time employment in his field spoke about why Black teachers matter as he recalled his experiences with the teachers who cared and took an interest in him and others like him:

I can't remember any Black teacher, if there was, I would know, it would really stand out, because all you see is White teachers and I remember my Indian teacher so much because she was just like a mother, caring and letting you know she saw you, and you can do it.

From this quote, it is apparent that some members had barely noticed the absence of Black teachers, having been conditioned to believe that teachers just tend to be white. Any coloured teacher stood out as they displayed a different attitude to the minority students

Those who had Black teachers were able to challenge notions that only Whites can teach, for instance Queen Amina spoke about what meeting a Black professor meant to her:

One time, I saw this Black professor. I was new at the university then. I was excited, and I smiled, waving, and said hi because that is who I wanna be. It was in my third year that I got to have my first Black professor. I talked to her after class sometimes and she said: "you can do it". It felt like Obama in the White House, like this can be me.

It was a rarity to see Black teachers, Queen Amina explained that the sight of a Black teacher conveys possibilities and helps them to imagine themselves in such spaces and positions. The White House, the classroom, the ivory tower no longer seems out of reach. Many Black students are excited when they first go to school e.g. kindergarten but lose that sense of positivity as the school environment excludes, demoralizes, and wears them down. Being taught by a Black professor appeared to renew that awe and inspiration. It can be deduced what seeing no one like themselves does to Black students every day.

Another respondent, Rahila, spoke nostalgically about her Black teachers:

I never had a Black teacher here, (Waterloo region) but in Toronto and Brampton I had Black teachers. They cared, mind you, they were strict, but they understood us. They just know what you need, and they believe in you. They knew I was being excluded when people did not want to work with me and they stepped in to help. After we moved here, I begged my mom to take us back. It was so hard because, in Waterloo, you are just "a nobody".

The presence of those with different experiences enriched the discussions as they shared experiences of having Black teachers and helped those whose only reality was Waterloo region to expand their thinking. They spoke of Black teachers in other cities who understand and intervene in contrast to feeling like nobodies in Waterloo region. They also felt respected and humanized because the Black teachers dignified them with their time and attention.

This made other youth like Ebony yearn for more culturally relevant education as she wondered what an Afrocentric school would look like, saying:

That is why I want to see the Afrocentric School in Toronto. Like, do they really allow them to use African style to learn the same things or how? That would be cool because here, all they teach us is from their own side, never anything good about us.

The youth curiosity about how Afrocentric ideas can be integrated into school reflects the Eurocentric nature of their current schooling which made it hard to imagine African ideas being incorporated into school. Through the dialogue, the youth began to envision other possibilities.

Some students believed that only Afrocentric schools have Black teachers, and this prompted Rahila to correct this view and point out that she was never in an Afrocentric school.

No, I did not attend the Afrocentric School, but I was taught by four Black teachers and there were other Black, Indian, and other teachers and they always treated us so well.

What these students desired was empathic fair even strict teachers, uplifting curriculum and humanizing inclusive education not necessarily in Afrocentric schools or only from Black teachers. They appreciated the sensitivity of coloured teachers who made them feel enfranchised.

Seeing that the few teachers of colour they encountered at school, treated empathized with them, and treated them humanely, Queen Amina concluded that Black teachers would do even more for Black students as she believed such teachers would understand and resonate with them as Black students.

My aunt is a Black teacher.... She gets what is going on in the school. I tell you, you can talk to Black teachers; they just get it. I know my aunt has gone through a lot herself to get there.

Queen Amina encouraged the younger ones to talk to Black teachers. She theorized that someone who had also faced racial discrimination would understand because they "get it".

Soyinka, a male participant opined that Black teachers, being marginalized themselves may be unable to help because of their own struggles, being in precarious substitute teaching position and having limited power.

What if the Black teacher can't help because they themselves are not so powerful, or if you are a substitute teacher? They are not there just for the Black student. A white teacher

would not be accused of helping white students because a white teacher helping white students is normal, but a Black teacher helping a black student, um, it's bad.

The above quote shows that youth are aware of challenges facing Blacks hired in systems that do not create a safe environment for them. Their statements illustrate their understanding that wanting Black teachers to be all things to them puts them under pressure. This speaks to the need to have more Black teachers in the schools, not just token representation. An individual Black person cannot address racial issues without the system itself adapting and transforming.

Soyinka was recognizing that making the responsibility for inclusion the sole duty of Black teachers is unfair. They face vicarious trauma by being identified with vulnerability and feelings about Black students held by the mainstream inadvertently get displaced onto the Black teachers. Because they are often in the lower echelons, they further find themselves in very precarious situations while those who are the agent group in the system once again remain untouched by the pain of both the Black students and teachers. This makes it important that the responsibility for inclusive practice should be shared by all and inclusivity should be diffused throughout the curriculum.

White teachers do try, but....

The students felt White teachers generally do not recognize their needs or know how to intervene even though they appreciated those who made efforts. Their gratitude may be due to not considering it to be the duty of White teachers or not feeling entitled to better treatment. Whatever the reasons, they expressed gratitude but also lamented the absence of Black teachers.

Zainab expressed that in her own experience White teachers might be willing but just did not have the training, ability, or human connection, as even when they tried to be nice; they made things worse and the follow is one of the examples she provided

When I first came, my teacher said, "Be nice," but that was it, no help with groups and they didn't want me even when I begged to work with them. I felt like I was a burden, I would be alone, and she would see it and look away, what can I do but just accept it?

Zainab transferred into a new school and although her teacher told the class to be nice, she ignored her obvious needs and did not see her as a priority because even though group work was required for her learning, the teacher did not intervene in things going on right in the class.

Zainab continued, saying that the limited help given, was not discreet or sensitive, even if well-intentioned, and was haphazard in nature depending on the teacher's mood:

One day my teacher said, "You know in Waterloo Region, we help many refugees, they are not like us, they have nothing". She might as well have told them to bully me. I'm not a refugee, I am an immigrant, and she doesn't know the difference. Imagine, telling my classmates, they are not like us? I am a student like them, same age, same class, same neighbourhood.

The above excerpt speaks to a helping attempt that was counterproductive. The teacher aligns with the white students and distances herself and the class from the African student and erodes the student of all but her blackness by ignoring the commonalities she shares with classmates. The teacher did not know the student or think through her words. The assumption that the Black student must be a refugee reveals generalizations and underscores the need for training for teachers and staff in cultural sensitivity to avoid unintended consequences.

Soyinka also decried generalizations and stereotypes towards Black boys which he described as cruel, frustrating and leads to many leaving the school.

There can be five or six white students doing their thing, it's normal, but if two Black students are together, then it's abnormal, Black dudes together; that's a gang, they just would not let me be. It was just too much, that is why I had to leave, no kidding, I left for my life.

The generalized notion that when Black youth converge, they are up to no good, breeds fear, perpetuates prejudice, and enables teachers to react without expanding their range of options and underlying assumptions or unintended consequences. Soyinka explained that he is nothing like those stereotypes and bemoaned how teachers demonized him because he is Black adding that these teacher attitudes lead to scrutiny of their every move, made them targets of bullying, suspensions, and expulsions. Soyinka said sadly, "they just would not let me be"

Princess, a female student, provided another example of unwanted and insensitive attention, adding that they may not be aware of the impact of their words.

Teachers ask, "Why is your hair like this?" They touch my hair, say it's too hard, my food smells, my name is too long, everything about me is bad, bad, bad. Teachers do this in front of students, they put all this into their heads, but they don't know that it makes them bully us.

The teacher's seemingly innocuous comments and habits profoundly affected the youth's body and self-image and ability to learn. Teachers could not address alienating behaviours experienced by the youth because they did not recognize it in others or themselves. Princess opined that teachers contributed to their peers bullying behaviours.

Maya reflected on how teachers who despise Blackness foster self-loathing as teachers unwittingly belittled her while she was going through crucial identity formation stages:

My teachers were good but, they are ignorant, sorry to say. This teacher asked me about the war in my country, Africa, but I was born in Canada, I don't know about any war and Africa is not a country. When my family was going back home, my teacher asked if I would be safe in Africa, and said she felt sorry for me being from Africa, everyone giggled, I felt so little.

Maya was upset by the teacher's uninformed questions but apologetic in talking about it. She conceded that they try but that did not lessen the feeling of being belittled and ridiculed.

Generally, the youth were tentative when discussing certain things about elders as the African ethos is to respect elders. However, making meaning of the insidious racism required them to acknowledge some of these shortcomings even if it was done with deference to their age and status. This may be misinterpreted as ambivalence or mixed message by non-Black teachers.

Not everything was about them as Black Africans, for example, 18 years old Princess' experiences enhanced her ability to help other marginalized students.

The boys were always mean to this girl with special needs. She would laugh, so they would continue but then she would start crying and hitting her head, but my teacher said she asked for it, why is she now crying? I had to help her and keep her from embarrassing herself.

Princess empathized with and helped her classmate living with a disability that was the target of cruel jokes and taunting by boys in their class. The teacher knew but dismissed what was going on as flirtatious. Princess recognized that the teacher was generally unable to help anyone considered different and had to watch out for her classmate.

This issue generated a lot of conversation and some youth felt more comfortable relating to the experiences to others in school rather than self-disclosing their own trauma. For Angel, her experiences of being bullied helped her connect with others as described below:

This girl asked me, "Is it a wig?" I wanted to be her friend, so I said yes and told her everything, thinking I now had a friend. In class, she took my wig, tossing it around until one girl shouted No! Mine was just my hair reacting to the perm and it grew back, but that girl, her mom had cancer and wore a wig too. She was in tears, later she told me they always called me ape.

Angel, a female respondent became emotional as she recalled an incident from her early days in high school. Her scalp reacted to some hair chemicals and she was forced to wear a wig, making her very self-conscious at the time as she not sure her hair would ever grow back. A

classmate she confided in betrayed her by passing her wig around the class. A student, whose mother was experiencing hair loss from cancer treatment unknown to everyone, stopped the prank and returned the wig. The two became friends, discovering unknown connections.

This speaks to lost teachable moments that can help both the disenfranchised and the entire student body. There is a need for training and more exposure to difference for teachers, so they can better understand the lives of the students they serve. The youth narrated many areas in which they gained insights into the oppression in the system and spoke of the need for their teachers to stop making uninformed statements to the whole class. They became allies with others as they also recognized that although the schools have policies, there is no mechanism for interrogating privilege and its impacts. As they turned to thinking about white privilege, Soyinka again emphasized the importance of having Black teachers mediating issues at school.

That is why having a black teacher matters. If you get in trouble, it is the White principal and White teacher, who will judge the case and you, will get in big trouble. But the person who started the trouble is not in the office and will not get a suspension. Because we are Black, they start policing us, asking questions – is your father in the picture, why won't we be angry?

He reported that they get into trouble more and the authorities deflect from the immediate issue by asking questions that turn the focus on their families. Although the schools have policies against racism, the policies become tools of policing them and their families and they receive harsher punishment including unwarranted suspensions.

The assumption that they are angry because their fathers are absent or violent bothered the youth who resented the assumptions and the interrogation they face from school authorities when they report injustice. They linked the insensitivity to the absence of Black teachers in the

schools, believing Black teachers would get to the root of the problem and dispose of issues fairly, citing their own ability to be empathic and protective of their fellow students.

Obafemi, the male participant who earlier said there may be no qualified Black teachers, said they are never given space at school to talk about their experiences and concluded that the school climate makes Black youth feel that their lives do not matter to anyone at school as he felt the lives of their pets matter more than Black lives.

If there are qualified Black teachers, then they should be in the school, because here, in the school, Black life does not matter. Their dog or cat's life matters more. We don't talk about Black Lives Matter in KW, they will be mad. Only in your family, you are somebody.

The students already know White lives matter; they even identified that the lives of cats and dog lives matter more than theirs outside their families and community. They felt they could not talk about what really matters to them out of fear of making others mad or being considered scary which they experienced as silencing and enables the mainstream to ignore their needs

The general apathy toward them breeds' indifference towards the school, for example, Zik thought it was futile:

I am in the class but can't hear what the teacher is saying, so why coming to school?

The alienation they experienced caused some youth to seek an escape, but youth are blamed when this happens. They recognized teachers are busy but felt vulnerable, unprotected, and unable to concentrate on their learning and began questioning the point of coming to school.

The youth did not want to be in the school because they did not feel anyone cared, not because they are non-cerebral or are lazy or found the work hard as portrayed in the media.

Nana describes how she goes through the motions, does her work and volunteers but feels the pain of being dehumanized in the school.

At school, I am a zombie, locker to class, and class to the locker. I do my work; get good grades, and feel happy when another day has passed and no trouble. I took part in clubs, just for community hours. After Jany died, nobody spoke about it even in multicultural and global action club. I do not belong there, but I have to go, so I go and run out when school closes.

They needed to escape the hostile and toxic environment at school and although they desired an education and felt pressure from their parents to stay in school, Soyinka decided he had endured enough, as he found the abuse, hostility, low expectations from teachers, silencing, skewed policies, and streaming away from academics, both overwhelming and triggering.

I felt, what am I gaining, I am a good student, but the teacher hates it when I do well. I just felt so angry all the time. They put me in the applied program and want me to play football, but I can choose my life. They give white students many chances because eh they're from a good family, they insult our families and I feel like I can kill someone for that. I just had to leave before I do something bad. I thought I don't want to be in jail, I don't want to shame my family.

He chose to leave school because he felt he had the right to exercise his own choices but did not make the decision lightly. He said he was a good student but left because he worried that he would be pushed into doing something regretful and so chose to leave after a lot of thought. He reported that his self-determination was paying off as he had risen to the position of foreman at work and was thankful he escaped doing anything regrettable, thus demonstrating that healthy and unhealthy responses may not be mutually exclusive.

On the other hand, Maya alluded to the power differentials at work between the White teachers and Black youth as well as their parents. She expressed that although she did not visibly react to patronizing statements from teachers and the belittling of her parents, she recognized and resented the maltreatment even though it was expressed as concern.

This teacher said she liked me because I was doing well in her class, but she was always saying things like "your parents don't know anything; university is expensive for people like you without supports". She said she wished she could take me home and give me a better life. That was awful, I felt sick, I wanted to run away and never see her, I don't need pity my family loves me, but I stayed and then I cried all night for three days. How can she be so mean to my family?

Because of the power differential, Maya felt she could not respond without getting into trouble. Other youth shared how feelings of shame, stigma, and desire for social acceptability as well as African tenets of respect for elders constrained them from reacting even when they recognized they were being abused or maltreated by adults. Maya was tearful as she recounted hurtful words from teachers whom she had been taught to respect and honour because they are adults and Africans revere elders. She was conflicted because these words were attacks not just on her but also her family. Teachers may unknowingly harm Black youth, take their silence for good behaviour, or harshly judge their resistance, ignoring systemic causes which colour the learning that youth receive in the region because of white privilege is reinforced by all the invisible structures of society and is prevalent in its impact in Waterloo region schools.

It is like “take it or leave it”: Non-inclusive curriculum

The youth in this study spoke at length about the curriculum, saying it was non-inclusive, they did not find themselves or their history represented or only in ways that reinforced their inferiority and furthered their oppression from peers, staff, teachers, and administrators alike.

Thembe, for example, reported that they are not exposed to Black or African studies as the systemic whiteness which causes exclusion of Black teachers also reflects in the curriculum

We don't learn about Black history because they say there is not enough time to cover everything. I was applying for a scholarship. I had to write an essay about Black contributions in Canada. I was so surprised at all my people did but good things about us are not taught.

Thembe was surprised to find out about African heroes and Black contributions to Canada and the world. He would not have stumbled on this if he had not been entering for a scholarship designed specifically to encourage Black youth access to post-secondary education. This speaks to the need for specific culturally informed interventions, scholarships and after-school programs that target ignored marginalized minority populations. Such programs should not be seen as discriminatory or required to demonstrate they serve all people because by their very nature, they are initiated to fill a gap left by systemic oppression.

It is not only what is omitted in the things they learn at school but also what is included that bothered the youth. Moremi said they were not taught about Africa at school but when Blacks were alluded to, it was for all the wrong reasons. She felt it is better not to be mention at all and narrated an experience she had in grade five that she could not forget:

My teacher told me to stand up and told the class that there would have been a lock on my lips and she continued talking about slavery. I just wanted to die and have never forgotten.

The anguish and injustice of their experiences were unthinkable. While teaching about African history or talking about Black history month once a year may be commendable, there must be training to ensure it does not become another site of oppression for Black bodies. The purpose of teaching must be clear and there must be reflection on the lens and the potential harm.

Angel's excerpt below reflects her ability to take a critical view of her teacher's approach to a topic that sounded great at face value:

In law class, they talked about justice and freedom, but they are always the heroes. It was in university that I learned to question, Europe expanded by capturing other people and their resources, young Black children waved empire flag and Japanese internment, is that heroism?

The above statement reflects the participants' consciousness-raising and growing recognition of the skewed perspectives passed on at school. She questioned the relevance of course content and application to their own lived realities especially when their only connection to the things being glorified was despicable, thus the curriculum was found to be alienating. This contrasts with their reports that events hosted by the multicultural center, Caribbean or African communities helped them learn positive things about their race and should be taught at school.

In this vein, Angel said she felt teachers and the school were not committed to positive educational aspirations for Black youth, narrating how the school not only failed to help her get a placement but discredited her efforts, seemingly wanting her to fail:

I told my teacher I need a new placement because my employer had me sweeping the floor every day. The other students said, tell the teacher but she just felt, I was not ready to work, and did not help me find a new placement. My parents got me a new one, and then the school suddenly wanted to help because they thought something good cannot come from my parents. The boss is not even Black, she is white, but she gave me real work and I worked hard. She always said you can be anything you want. At Christmas, I said, "I am Muslim, I don't celebrate, I can help you". She was happy and gave me a good reference letter for university.

This youth showed that generalizations are odious. Black youth are portrayed as lazy and unmotivated; but actually, have to struggle against the non-inclusive curriculum, lack of support for their learning and poor expectations of them and their families in order to get an education. Her middle-class family Background enabled her parents to get her a placement that met her

learning goals and educational aspirations. The help of her parents' friend was initially met with skepticism. The school failed to investigate why the employer reserved floor sweeping for the only Black female intern. Also as a Black Muslim, the assumption that her parents' friends could only be Black and incapable of offering anything good was not lost on her. It is ironic that an internship sweeping floors was deemed better than one with a Black employer.

Angel's ability to combat the school and employer's racism and her determination to focus on her goals was found to be more common among the youth than portrayed in the media. Moremi's story below is another example of motivation and healthy resistance as she infused African knowledge into her school work and was able to enrich the curriculum for everyone.

I suggested The Trials of Brother Jero or the Lion and the Jewel by Wole Soyinka for our school play. My mom said choose Wole Soyinka because they can't argue with a Nobel Laureate, I did and they all had to learn that we too have our own W.S.

With the support of her mother, Moremi challenged the school; those who did not know about Wole Soyinka had to learn or find out to their own chagrin their ignorance about one who had received the highest honour in his field. The youth transgressed individually and collectively because they wanted their schools to be communities of learning in a kaleidoscope of colours and cultures by integrating absented knowledge and cultural heritage.

Manifestations and Effects of Alienation

Fighting to navigate barriers of non-representative staffing, attitudes, and narrow curriculum in Waterloo Region schools impact youth tremendously and this second subsection on the second major theme from the study's findings, focuses on findings related to these effects

Black African youth face daily insidious racial trauma and alienation whether they can prove it is racism or not, the effects are harmful, enduring and impact their physical, social, and mental health as well as their life trajectories.

Ebony a female participant demonstrated wisdom beyond her years saying:

It is not that we don't know there is racism, but what do we gain by saying it? If you call everything that is racist, you will fight all the time. They don't like to be called racist; we don't have to be like, in your face. I just say, I am a girl like you, why are you afraid of me?

Participants did not want to risk offending the school community which has already been noted as non-representative. They also feared getting into trouble or being seen as the cause of White defensiveness as no one wanted to be seen as racist. They wanted to get along with others, were worn out down by the need to fight to belong and learn and therefore made concessions, appealing to common denominators, such as being females, to shift the focus from race onto their shared humanity and their right to be in the same space.

The hostility did not, however, abate as Nana 10th-grade female student shows:

They laugh at you, using their locker door as cover but pointing and giggling. They whisper or keep quiet when you come near, making you so uncomfortable, I am like what have I done when my classmate will just turn their back or don't want to sit with you.

She described taunts, ridicule, ignoring, whispers and other hurtful behaviours that made her feel unwanted. This is worrisome when seen against the background that schools required Black youth to prove any report about racism. Although they felt the hostility, it is hard to report that others were laughing around their lockers or somebody got up when you joined the table but they definitely observed a pattern.

Miriam spoke of the enduring impact that is hard to forget when they face humiliation which leads to self-doubt as they begin to question what is wrong with themselves.

One day everybody was looking at a drawing on the board and laughing, so I went to see and I just started crying. I just felt, why I was born this way so they can pick on me like this. They think it's a joke, they forgot it, but how can I ever forget such hatred?

She was caricatured, and her self-image was attacked through a drawing by an unknown person who succeeded in tormenting Miriam while the whole class laughed. She speaks of the lingering effects and how hard it is to forget. It is astounding that Black youth wake up and make it to school daily in the face of experiences that leave such indelible mark, yet the mental health of Black youth is ignored as their responses are attributed to the proclivity of their race.

Given these reports about the hostility they endured, it was no surprise that the youth felt unsafe at school but Zik also reported being afraid on the way to and from school.

I was afraid to walk in some places at school, and at recess because the teachers do nothing. They spit at you, throw things at you, call you names, try to make you fight them on the way to the bus, but teachers say it was not on school property. But they take seriously cyber bullying even though it is not at school. We just don't even bother reporting anymore.

This speaks to the need for awareness in the school system as Black youth felt dismissed. The idea that youth safety on the way to or from school is outside the school's jurisdiction made the youth feel vulnerable as peers learn that they can get away with bullying them due to lack of follow through by school authorities. They stopped reporting as they found no closure in contrast to the school's response to cyber bullying which also often occurs outside school.

Rahila also mentioned other ways racial alienation manifests and goes unaddressed

They wrote the thing on my locker. Then I started to think: it can be him, it can be her, and I began to be afraid, I was not afraid before, but I cannot trust anybody again.

From the above narrative, racist behaviours carried out under cover of anonymity made students feel scared and self-conscious instead of being able to relax and learn. Rahila explains she was unable to trust anyone after that incident, being unsure of what her peers were capable of, made her become hyper-vigilant. Since the authorities did not follow through to identify the culprit, she reasoned, it could happen again, making it hard to trust or feel safe.

Both male and female students felt unsafe and had their learning impacted as what schools emphasize or ignore can adversely impact learning as expressed by Obafemi:

I come to school afraid of what will happen after school because they will say your brother did that in Toronto or US. Even when a Black person is killed they still bully me for that.

The males found that people took advantage of news about a Black person committing a crime in Toronto or the US to bully them but what was very scary was that it did not matter whether the Black person was the offender or the one killed even if they were unarmed.

Some of those killed were young and it resonated with these participants who got the backlash of racial slurs and hateful speech even if the killing was in the US as noted by Thembe:

We were going home from school; we got to the crossing and this car drove towards us. The next thing I knew they were spitting on me, saying "go to your country." My friends were shocked, cursing, and running after the car. I said it's OK. We see it all the time, at least they are not shooting me, it's just name calling, why running after them?

Thembe's friends were shocked reflects their lack of connection to the lived realities of their Black peers. Thembe had to reassure his friends even though they get to move on with their own lives after feeling uncomfortable and angry momentarily but the harm to Thembe and other

Black youth is unimaginable as his words below suggest that he expects and even minimizes the racial slurs.

Kwame also describes an incident which illustrates many effects they live daily:

After soccer practice, a police car kept following us, we parked, they stopped, and the officer asked, "What are you doing here?" Coach pulled up, and said, "What is the matter? Why are you harassing my boys? Finest gentlemen you could ever find Go and chase real criminals" The officer did not ask why coach was angry, but if I was the one, I can get shot. He told the officers, your daughters would be lucky to find such fine young men to marry.

Kwame reported that they were rescued by their coach who humanized the youth, describing them as gentlemen to the police officers, thus disrupting the criminality discourse with his knowledge of the youth. Kwame's comment that he could get shot however shows that the killings and shootings of other Black youth weighed on their minds because they were aware of how they are socially constructed. Also, the comment about the coach's ability to show anger while they are not permitted highlights the deep effects, these racist manifestations have on the youth whether they let on or continue to respond to their tormentors in socially acceptable ways.

Silencing and underreporting.

Where the youth do not have formidable allies like the coach, the effect is that they are silenced. Reacting to racial slurs or other forms of bullying can get them into trouble as they are already constructed as the intimidating stranger. The males, in particular, are constructed as dangerous, intimidating, and threatening as Soyinka's quote shows.

We were all playing in the gym, somebody whispered "monkey.", trying to get me to fight so they can report, and the teacher will think we are always bad, so I said, no, I will not fight.

Any reaction from him would be swiftly noticed and punished as his Black body would reinforce pre-existing bias and blind spot teachers may have to other youth. Soyinka knew he would get into trouble and be made out to be the problem. The mental health effects of being pre-judged labeled and silenced are immense but hard to challenge as noted by Zik:

Somebody said, "Climb the monkey bar, I'll give you a banana." I told the teacher on duty, she said but it's called monkey bar, that's the name. They were all laughing and still, she pretended she did not understand and made me look like a fool.

Zik faced the power of unexamined blind spots and prejudices; his ability to obtain redress is severely limited because it is hard to keep reporting after facing ridicule even though he was not ignorant of the name but well aware of the meaning of the taunts. The teacher's response gave ammunition to the bullies and the public humiliation evoked shame in Zik.

Obafemi also recounted being silenced by shame:

One time, a boy called me nigger because we won the soccer match. He didn't want to shake my hand but whispered nigger, I didn't tell anyone as I felt too ashamed for that word.

Obafemi was the one who felt ashamed, not the offender and felt he could not react or he would be punished. These examples speak to the validity of the youth's concerns for their safety as those entrusted with them at school are oblivious to the perils they face because they are deemed to be the violent ones. Their abuse and degradation was permitted, enabled to continue and took on gendered forms due to inaction as described by participants

Gendered manifestations

Female voices

A picture of gendered manifestations and effects of racism was apparent in the youth's stories. Findings related to the complexities of their gendered experiences are summarized as the females emphasized that it was not only males that were abused as shown in Angel's quote:

It's not only boys, you know I am a girl, and they always said they were afraid of me. You are stepping out of the bathroom, you open the door, and you expect to see people, right? So, am I not a person? My teachers said, "don't be scary" so she also believed, I am a monster too?

Teachers also bought into the attempts of students to demonize their Black peers by making them out to be scary. Angel queries White adult female teachers who fear her even though she is only a girl, surmising that by not addressing racial issues, teachers unwittingly give tacit reinforcement to racial stereotypes

Angel had earlier shared some of the ways girls are made to feel uncomfortable by unwanted attention to their hair, names, food etc. They received damaging messages about themselves as Black young women which can create insecurity and poor body image. It also ignites a need to compensate for society's ascribed low status.

Maya said her father reminded her of this continually:

My father always told me, you have two strikes against you: you are a girl and you are Black. You have to go to university and get a good career. I know he wants the best for me but...two strikes? You feel fear as a woman and you get it from your race too.

In this case, both the father and the daughter are traumatized by social constructions that are not based in fact but affect young women deeply. All youth have to grapple with identity issues, but Black youth have added layers to negotiate. The father conveyed to his daughter that she requires extra effort to combat these societal suppositions, but she resented having to bear the burden of society's assumptions

Although the young women described how they performed womanhood, they also demonstrated a surprising form of resistance that represents an attempt to gain control over their bodies and lives as reflected in Adaobi's assertion below:

I will not have children because they will be Black, and society will treat them badly.

Queen Amina agreed with her, saying she would also pass up the opportunity of having children as she did not want to bring dark children into the world, adding that:

It is worse than disability because there is a probability that your child will not have a disability, but 100 percent, if I have children, they will be Black even if I marry someone fair.

They both argued that although it is considered un-African not to have children, they were only demonstrating their right to self-determination as they do not want the heartbreak, fears, and worries of having a Black child which they had seen in their own parents.

Angel who is a little older than both Queen Amina and Adaobi said she desired to have children but also wished she could be spared the agony of knowing her children would have to face racism, and always have to live in fear.

They all claimed they did not personally consider light skin to be better, but were aware society characterizes fair skin and long hair as superior and equates dark with evil both for males and females. Angel said besides seeing parents worry she personally experienced racial profiling, scrutiny, and being followed suspiciously:

One day I was in the store, the clerk kept following me through the aisles; it was so obvious, so I turned around and challenged her. I showed her my \$100 gift card and university ID and asked what else do we need to do? I am an undergraduate and all you see is a thief because I'm Black. That day I decided young girls cannot suffer alone, became active in the African Students' Association, and started speaking up and why I wanted to be here too.

The effects of anti-Black racism are enormous, even impacting the life choices of these young women because they worried they would suffer heartache and grief if they brought children into the world only to see them killed or incarcerated. These are strong commentaries on society being made by these young women both in questioning whether to have children based on what they have seen happening to Black children. It also influenced them to become activists fighting for those who are oppressed. Thus, regardless of societal denial, young people were deeply impacted by the plight of young Black people like themselves.

Male voices

Black males were aware of how they are seen by the society which often differs from their own self-views, but they recognize whom the police, teachers, and others believe them to be and find the hyper-vigilance required of them very tiring. Soyinka asked a very direct question:

Did you ever hear any white boy say, "All this privilege, Black boys should enjoy it too"? Never! The school, police, everybody blames Black guys, so it is suspension and carding all the time. Even in Victoria Park, we see the police, we just leave, I tell you no one will believe you if they kill or frame you. No teacher stands for a Black boy and they won't believe your parents.

This highlights the double consciousness under which the youth as they navigate their identities in relation to the ideas of others. They know the repercussions can be grievous for them and their families or even fatal. Regardless of what they encounter, the Black youth felt they were not permitted to be themselves, as they were expected to live up to myths and whimsical but hurtful stereotypes.

Kwame said he would have quit school totally had his parents not changed his school:

When I came to Canada I was 13 and tall. Everyone thought I was cool, so the girls expected me to do some things that I would not do. I was raised in a Christian family and not used to the wayward things, so I refused but they continue. I begged my parents to change my school, but the teacher told them I was a big hit with the girls. She blamed me, but the girls only like me because they expect some things from bi-racial guys and I am not like that. I stopped going to school, my parents tried to force me, then our family doctor said I had an anxiety problem, so I tried online classes and prayed and prayed until my parents just had to move me.

Ideas about hypersexual Black men are perpetuated by the media and general society and the youth are caught in the dilemma of living up to the reputation or becoming ostracized. This young man was bullied and physically abused until he got to move to a private school.

Mandela said schools and society blame and discredit them which is frustrating and sometimes causes tensions between the children and parents as in the example below:

When Jany was killed, at the funeral, my dad said, "See what I have been telling you, and you think I am mean. Mandela, you are Black, you are not white. The saying "boys will be boys", only applies to their sons, not to Black boys, can't you see, I don't want to bury my son.

This father's misgivings were confirmed when Jany, a young Sudanese teen in the region was killed. It was no longer something that happens elsewhere, the young man was in school, popular, and well liked in the KW area. He was stabbed to death by a white teenager who was released on bail immediately as the media activated the usual stories that he must have been stabbed for criminal activity, referring to his assailant as a skinny boy from a good family with a good future and Jany as a tall big Black man even though he was 18 and his killer was 19.

Participants continued to give examples of being carded, harassed, attacked, and accused in Waterloo region on the basis of their skin colour.

Thembe said he understood that parents feared they might pay the ultimate sacrifice but also felt it was unjust to be unable to live normal lives and recounted the following:

The police stopped us, on King Street. He went to her side and asked, "Are you OK?" She said yes. He glared at me and repeated, "Are you OK?" She got very angry and asked, "Why wouldn't I be". He left, and she just kept saying, I'm so sorry, I said, "Yeah, that's our life.

In spite of their desire to live normal lives, be with whoever they want, and go wherever they choose, they were constantly reminded that they were bodies out of place. Thembe's White female companion was shocked and upset but he said "yeah! That's our life", letting her know it is commonplace for Black males. Witnessing the raw unwarranted terror of racism can help others appreciate that Black people do not provoke racism. They do not have to do something to be carded; it unfortunately comes with being Black and is normalized by society.

Females re: males.

The females in this study were concerned about their own experiences while grappling with mixed emotions, "bail or blame" tensions, and desire to protect their brothers from societal injustice but also caught in family dynamics with worried parents. They were loyal to their brothers, bailing them one minute, advocating the next, and even fighting others on their behalf and generally experiencing vicarious trauma. Moremi had this to say about her brother:

My brother got in trouble; teachers think he is dangerous because of the friends he hangs out with. He was sent from regular school to a behavior school. He was so mad and would not attend because he felt he did not belong there. I told him, they are not worth it, but he listened to his friends and was upset, saying how can teachers believe the lies? I didn't tell our mom that he is not going because she works a lot to care for us and is already mad at him. I ask him, "Do you want to kill her? Now I just help my little sister when mom is working.

Society considers some immigrants good and others bad, but the males have sisters who are torn, as they see and are impacted by the injustice meted out to their brothers. They also feel very deeply the pain caused to their families and are caught in a “bail or blame” tension of loyalty to parents, defending their brothers, and wanting to keep the peace.

In this regard, many of the participants said their siblings chose not to attend because they are aware Black masculinity is equated with criminality which led their brothers to believe they are already judged by researchers and the general society.

Nana illustrates the generalizations and unjust judgments thus:

My friend had a crush on a Black guy and her mother told her "Black boys are not good, very hypersexual, they are all criminals and not to be trusted. When they come to Kitchener, her mother tells her to lock the car; this is the Black part of town."

Prejudices about sex and crime are activated in response to Black males, and the sisters were frustrated in their desire to protect their brothers. They reported getting mad at white girls who merely want to sexualize their brothers or those who fail to recognize that they are gentle even when they are big and tall.

Princess shared how she challenged her brother's girlfriends and scared some off:

You want to be his girlfriend, can you go and march in Black Lives Matter protest, can you? Can you tell the world he is just a big teddy bear, not all those lies, can you?

Although Princess described her brother as just a big teddy bear, her knowledge would not be regarded like that of the coach who was able to mediate the police officers' response to his players. The young men know no one believes them or their parents. The female siblings are in a unique situation as they know exactly what goes on but feel helpless to help. The elders who were present were witnesses to these stories and the normalization of myths which cause anguish.

Race Trumps Class

The class and the race of the coach above enabled him to defend his Black players. Class does not necessarily mitigate the impact of race for Black youth as class and race did for the coach. Some felt that rich students were treated better by teachers and were considered more popular by fellow students, but others said it was mostly rich White students. Although the players were from middle-class families, belonged in the neighbourhood, and were driving their parents' car the police officers only saw their Blackness they saw and accosted them, believing they were bodies-out-of place for driving a fanciful car in an upscale neighbourhood.

Intersection of class and race trauma caused immigrant youth to feel relief when their families began to get established in Canada as aptly captured by Miriam's narrative:

We have this ADT sign in front of our house; it is my sign that we are going to be OK. Imagine! My family too has a house worth protecting. The area is nice, the school is better, our computers are fast; parents do fundraising, so we go on nice trips. Teachers are nicer when they know you live in a house, not apartment but when the secretary knew which house, she started wondering how we got the house. I wanted to say google him but didn't.

The youth were ecstatic when their parents finally got jobs in their professions or moved them from subsidized housing to their own homes. However, they were saddened that aspersions were cast on their parents' integrity no matter what they did to better themselves. Black African families impress on their children that education brings about social mobility and compensates for the race effect, but it remains a factor even when class creates advantages.

Zainab remembered when they stopped buying everything from Value village and her parents could buy her bench sweaters, designer shoes and other status symbols that were valued in their schools but talked about the challenges her parents had trying to get ahead in Canada:

We were rich before we came to Canada, but our parents had to start all over again, so they were working and going to school to give us everything, but my brother got mixed up and was doing what his friends want so they can like him. He was doing weed and skipping school until my parents found out.

Society's racial barriers such as devaluation of foreign qualifications and discrimination impact parents put pressure on families to overcompensate, and complicated family dynamics and all these complicated stressors impacted the health and well being of the participants.

Alienation and Health

Racism and alienation have grave health consequences for the youth some of whom experienced intense physical reactions such as aches and pains to the trauma at school.

Miriam spoke of her experience at the thought of going to school thus:

I would wake up and my tummy would start to hurt when I think of going to school. At times, I would throw up so much; they would take me to the doctor. She said there must be something wrong at school, but it's not one thing that is wrong; it is everything at school that is wrong.

In the above quote, Miriam was speaking of the body's response to the pain the youth attempted to contain within themselves. Tellingly, she said "it is not one thing that is wrong, it is everything at school that is wrong". Anxiety about the ordeals she would face at school resulted in physical symptoms which affected her school attendance and learning

Others also spoke about not having outlets for addressing the hurt they felt, trying to be strong but finding they could not go on as their minds and bodies resisted the torments and pain. Adaobi recognized her parents would be disappointed as education was what they hoped would help her overcome the double strikes against her. She wrestled with the decision and did not take

it lightly but ultimately had to take a break for the sake of her sanity as she needed to find herself and recalibrate in order to continue her educational pursuits:

After high school, I was tired and needed to take time off school as I just wanted to sleep all the time. Those four years in high school killed me! I graduated with the high 90s and got into university, but I was sad, I kept asking myself, why did I put up with all that? At first, my parents did not understand but, I was not emotionally ready for more trauma of what I went through.

Adaobi was fatigued from long years of navigating racial trauma. The thought of facing another four years of daily racial assault overwhelmed her. She blamed herself for putting up with the racism but now out of high school, her body had permission to address her trauma and in spite of the pressure from her parents, she took the year off school to process the things she had endured and recalibrated herself.

Black youth experience physical effects of racism including bullying, stress-related illness, fatigue, and others such as injuries from fights, shooting, stabbing or even suicide. However, long before the bodies succumbed to physical effects of racial trauma, Black youth have faced untold mental and emotional torments which are ignored in hegemonic discourses about Black youth which is a form of discursive violence

Mental Health

The youth described social and emotional challenges impacting their mental health. They struggled to make friends and told of being excluded from birthday parties, sleepovers, or being lied to by friends whose parents opposed their having Black friends as recalled by Zainab:

My friend's dad told her she can't invite me to their house but initially, she lied. Over the summer, she would hang out with White kids, so we got together with family friends who accepted us and church friends I stopped feeling rejected and thinking something is wrong with me.

The White parents were suspicious of cross-cultural friendship, but Zainab's parents facilitated friendships among their circle. This speaks to the misconception that Black youth want to huddle together, it was not a choice, they could not insist on only being with Blacks.

As Adaobi explains, they faced rejection from White peers in spite of their best efforts:

I spent most of my school years trying to make them like me, but it was like everything about me was bad. They used me when they needed me, took my notes and my things, but no matter how I tried, I realized, the main thing they didn't like was my skin.

This speaks to the sense of futility she felt in spite of giving her possessions in a bid to gain friends but faced continued rejection except when being used and had to face the hard truth that their own needs were not being met in these friendships.

For example, Moremi said when she needed group work partners "friends" deserted her:

Group work is the worst, they don't want to work with you, I switched out of my French class as my friend was in another class and nobody wanted to work with her too. I was tired of begging White people to be in their group and the teacher did not help. We formed our own group; let anybody say oh the Blacks are together; I just did not want to fail.

This is another example of two Black youth having to find others who look like them to do group work not because they did not want to work with White peers but because they were bound by their common experiences of rejection. It also demonstrated that contrary to how they are presented, many are committed to their learning. It also points to a need for instructors to

recognize when students are excluded and help them. Schools need to take some responsibility to help students integrate, the assumption that there is no racism causes subtle acts of racism to go unrecognized and unnamed.

Princess' narrative below however shows that non-acknowledgment leads to their White peers feeling more entitled which necessitated her taking action a decisive action for herself:

When my friends and I go out they always choose where we go, what we watch and what we eat. If I talk they don't listen, if I say can we see this movie, they would say, "Let us vote," and it's four of them against me, and they always want their own thing, I just said, enough!

The above example shows that White people can have Black friends and point to this as evidence of not being racist, but it does not mean the friendship is equitable. Sometimes Black youth resigned themselves to white fragility and innocent self-righteousness which decries others as racist but remains oblivious to their own subtle subconscious acts of oppression.

Ebony also took stock and discontinued some relationships but not without grief:

It hurt, it hurt badly, it is hard not to have friends, I cried, I was depressed but it is not worth it to have friends that are not friends. My mom desperately wanted me to have friends. She said, "what of that girl, who came to take your notes that day?" I told her this girl ignores me at school, she's just using me. It was hard for mom to accept that no one wanted to be my friend. She said if you want to have friends, you must be friendly, I yelled at her to stop looking at me like a loser, but I was really telling myself, it is OK to get angry at all they did to me.

This mother was a sounding board for her daughter's pent-up emotions, as her friend took her things in private but shunned her publicly. Abandoning unhealthy friendships involved the grief and loss of negotiating friendship versus dignity. It was part of the complexities of being Black in Waterloo region's schools which took huge mental health toll on the youth

Social work support

The adverse mental health effects on Black African youth made the need for proactive positive social work support and engagement imperative. A major finding of this study is that social work support directed at the wellbeing and health of Black African youth is non-existent in Waterloo region schools. Most did not even know of the existence of social workers or the supports they are able to provide as they thought social workers only enforce attendance and take children away. This finding is concerning because Black African children are mandated to be in school and if they are being harmed there, social workers are expected to advocate on their behalf and act in their best interest.

Most of the other participants in this study echoed Moremi's words below:

Social workers, maybe they are there to help, I don't know.... They are not usually in my school, but if they are, I don't see them. I don't know anything about social workers in the school because they did nothing for me but maybe it's because I am not a troublemaker.

Moremi assumed social workers work with troublemakers, which shows the reactive nature of school social work. Their ability to help youth process and heal from the health impacts of the trauma they experience at school was not known. Assigned to several schools, they are unable to focus on proactive, preventive, relationship building before issues become a crisis as voiced by Zainab:

Guidance counselors and school nurses, yes, but social workers are not at the school all the time. They come, and everybody whispers, asking who is going to foster care.

The youth were aware of other helping professionals in the school but not of social workers or were misinformed of their role, experiencing them as people to be afraid of and to whom the school reported families.

Another issue was that social workers are assigned to many schools and are unable to get to know the students in any school or do meaningful work with them as explained by Zainab

I did not know social workers are there to help you but she came to our class and explained everything, so I went to see her. She said she would be going to five other schools and the next week she will be in training, so until she comes back to my school. I decided, no point, I will deal with this myself. Maybe if social workers were permanent in schools, they would actually know the students and help them, not waiting for those in trouble.

As some teachers and staff considered Black parents inferior, for youth feeling unsafe at school to believing social workers do the school's bidding and wield such power was scary as depicted in Ebony's story:

They yelled at my friend's father thinking he was the custodian. He tried to explain that he was a parent, but they did not listen and were rude. Then they reported him to child welfare for getting angry at the way they yelled at him. When the social workers talked to my friend, they had concluded that her dad is an angry violent man. She asked, "So you just want me to lie and say my dad hits me?" They said we want the truth, and she said "I have told you, he loves me, takes me places, plays games with me and he does not hit me, but you don't believe.

Social workers by the nature of the profession are well placed to address health and social wellbeing of youth and ensure youth become engaged productive Canadian adults. There is definitely a yawning gap that can be filled by social workers given the level of mental health, anxiety, and trauma faced by Black youth in the school system, but it requires social workers to be agents of change not just guardians of the social order.

Transformation and Triumphs

Notwithstanding the lack of social work support and contrary to cultural hegemony the youth narratives displayed high sense of self-esteem, resilience, resistance, and agency in spite of the insidious alienation, rejection and racial trauma they faced constantly at school. The process of meaning-making for Black African youth included supports such as parents, faith, community, family, allies, and advocacy. They described hopeful visions for the future and roles they hope to play in bringing about social change. Their suggestions inform the recommendations I make later in this dissertation as the youth are regarded as the experts of their own lived experiences and the best source of possible solutions based on their processes of understanding their barriers and what they need from. Although the youth experienced pain and trauma, they displayed remarkable abilities which enable a positive optimistic outlook on their future. Some of the supports the participants currently draw on in the absence of social workers are discussed below.

Parents: yearnings and sacrifices.

Among others, the participants pointed to parents as sources of inspiration, hope, and succor. They were motivated by their parents' yearnings and sacrifices which showed they believe in the youth and this was expressed in Adaobi's description below.

We moved into our new house and the next day, I knelt down, shedding tears of joy and thanked my parents. They came here for us; they believe in us and did this for us. It meant so much and my goal is to help them when I finish school because I know mortgage is a lot to pay.

The realization that their parents had sacrificed a lot for their future by relocating to Canada to give them a better future contributed to feelings of gratitude. Many talked about being impressed that their parents considered them worth all the sacrifices of leaving their country, family, and professions to start all over again which gave the youth a sense of worth and purpose

Obafemi stated that his parents help him stay calm and regulated in the face of racism even when he questioned the value of going to school and chose to leave the school system

My parents said no one can take your power from you. You fight by doing well. I left and kept asking why they are saying go to school, go to school, but they went back for their own qualifications here and now we are OK. I am working hard too and may go back to school later.

Much as they appreciated the parental support, some youth felt parents do not always understand what they are going through at school. Parents, who not only asked them to go to school but also modeled the same, inspired their children especially if the family fortunes improve upon obtaining Canadian education. Education was a form of resistance to get ahead but opting out of school was also a form of resistance as parents' efforts did not always yield desired outcomes. Sometimes the disagreements with parents helped the youth gain insights into the complexities of the Canadian system and go up against the system together.

Zik also told of his parents helping him make sense of his heritage and aspirations.

I was called whitewashed; my white friends bash Black people and tell me, I am different. They think being called white is a compliment. My father said a bastard looks down on his father's house; he was telling me to be proud of being an African.

His father emphasized the importance of his African heritage and identity. He understood the proverb's philosophical message and his father used this to convey their uniqueness. Divide and conquer strategies of colonialism eroded shared language, which this father combats by giving Zik an anchor phrase to connect him to home, roots, and family.

However, not all conversations were that easy as Black parents have the added responsibility of giving their children "the race talk." Thembe spoke of how his parents gave

their children the hard facts about racism to ensure they are not naïve but equipped for life in a racist world for their own safety:

When Trayvon Martin died my dad sat us down and said if they stop you, do not show them your anger. He said I don't know what to tell you, son, to put up your hand or keep it in your pocket. I just pray God will keep you safe. Uhm! I saw my dad cry, he felt so helpless.

Some youth were initially embarrassed and intolerant of the slower pace of adaptation of parents who did not school in Canada, but the relationship changed as the youth grew older and became more aware of systemic realities.

Mandela shared experiences that awakened him to the importance of family:

“I remember going for school interview and the teacher and other parents waiting in line, were so impatient. I was ashamed and stopped giving my parents information about school meetings. But when I was wrongly accused, if not for my parents, I would have gone to jail. They helped me get back on my feet, made sure the truth came out and everybody started apologizing. I am proud of my parents, they speak seven languages, they are smart, they raised me to be a good African, but I was sometimes so desperate to belong, impressing people who don't care. Be proud of your parents, they won't leave you when you're 16.”

Mandela's perspectives changed as his awareness grew, seeing the flaws in the dominant schema, he needed the parents he had considered embarrassing. He began to appreciate his parents and gained a deeper respect for their efforts to instill cultural identity. As an older youth and college graduate, he admonished other participants to be proud of their parents.

Moremi also saw her parents as a great strength and anchor as reflected in this quote:

When we lived in Africa, I did not fit in. They said I was white, here now, I am Black, but I am not athletic, can't dance and kind of a nerd, so not Canadian or African. We are a bi-racial family, but my parents helped me. They sacrificed and were always there showing me both sides.

We see complex intergenerational relationships; youth were embarrassed by parents' limited knowledge of the system but also appreciated when parents came through for them, building them up when friends, school, and society abandoned them.

This growing awareness led to some of the youth wanting to spare or protect their parents because they recognized their immense struggles and sacrifices as Maya's quote shows:

We often don't want to ask our parents for things. I said I don't have to go on class trips or pay for picture day, but my parents were sad. They said we should let them decide what they can afford and that even if they don't change their clothes, they will always have enough for our education. That sticks with me and motivates me to work hard so I can repay them.

The overall feeling was that despite the tensions and struggles, parents motivate, help, and inspire Black African youth and enhance their self-esteem. Parents combined sacrificing to give their children a good future with instilling cultural identity and grounding them, thus giving a sense of worth and motivating them to work hard.

Connections to Africa

In addition to parents, the participants also spoke of connections to their Africa, extended family, the African Association, and other sources of inspiration. Parents begin these connections, but the youth displayed agency by embracing the opportunities they bring.

Nana explains that this was a choice she made in the face of opposition and rejection:

I found my own friend; no one helped me. I said, "Are you from Ethiopia?" She said yes, we started talking and I said let's be friends. That's the difference because we are African sisters,

her family is my family. I was tired of people who can only be your friend at school, they are ashamed of you.

Nana did not stay despondent even when her efforts to develop friendships at school were rejected but found ways to form meaningful relationships through her African connections.

Some youth also spoke of programs in the African and Caribbean community that imprinted their lives, enabling them to understand the contributions of Black Canadians and Blacks worldwide, as well as other information not taught at school as narrated by Soyinka:

In homework club, we watched movies that got us thinking, made me angry but also makes you strong and no longer believing what others tell us. That is why when Nelson Mandela died, I wanted to attend the memorial event, but my school was not even aware. My dad said, "They should be taking you to these things." He pulled me out of school, I went, and I was proud to be an African!

Whether they were researching for scholarship essays or attending the after-school homework club, or multicultural events, they were exposed to knowledge not provided at school, that evoked pride in them as Africans and helped them identify with Africa.

Another support identified by the youth was extended family connections, and visits to the home country and Adaobi talked about the transformation that came from her trip:

There, I was part of a big family. I was amazed that my aunts remembered cute words I said when I was small. They asked which university I planned to go to because they just expected it. I saw myself differently, started doing well in school, I had been so distracted until I saw that my school was the one with the problem, not me.

At the time of the study, Adaobi was completing her undergraduate studies but referred to a trip she took in high school which made a difference in her life. She developed alternative narratives and frame of reference in terms of expectations and possibilities.

Connections to history, culture, and community resources validated the youth's cultural capital and fostered their identity formation. The consciousness of some youth was raised by actually going to Africa rather than depending on what the mainstream tells them about their origins. Mandela traveled on his own, spent four months with his grandparents and extended family and credits it with changing his life by giving him a view of his place and purpose in life:

You are eager to belong; you think your parents just see racism everywhere, but when I got there, I saw what it's like to be accepted and my eyes opened. I wanted to stay there; everyone was kind, hospitable, teaching me, connecting me to everyone else. I could not let them down, I had lots of conversations with my cousins, some of them also in university at home and I thought, wow! They are not stupid; they are just like me. Also, I realized, have no excuse, I can't let my grandparents down, in fact, I want to give back to them and to Africa. I finally get what my parents mean when they say, don't give them control, take charge by doing well.

Psychologically, it can be damaging to be exposed only to a worldview that excludes you and some youth feel the urge to take the trip back to their country of origin to understand who they are and their place in the world. These young Black Africans were able to deconstruct mainstream stories about Africa, connect to a reality that includes them and people with whom they resonate. It also addressed their sense of entitlement, and challenged ideas about Blacks in Africa being poor and dumb, as their relatives embraced them, filling them up physically, morally, spiritually, and culturally which spurred a desire to maximize their opportunities,

The youth decried the notion that "white is best" and were glad they learned about what it means to be African in through various avenues. Angel had this to say of these African exposures:

Knowing about Africa from the elders helps us, we learn many things we never heard before, here I feel safe, no looking over my shoulder because people here understand.

The youth commended the African association and elders for the spaces they created for social interactions and cultural connections. They reported feeling safe and grounded and appreciated the fact that within the community, they did not need to convince people or explain themselves when they were with people who understand, and this had a positive impact on them.

Resistance and Resilience

The positive impacts include the ability to begin naming their experiences as trauma. Knowing that it was not inherent, or part of their nature was key to overcoming the feelings of embodied stigma. Recognizing and externalizing negative labels as not part of their genetic makeup ensures they can resist, challenge, or address the stigma; otherwise, they would succumb to self-loathing, internalized or lateral oppression such as Black-On-Black violence which Western society likes to emphasize to divert attention from root causes of manifest behaviours.

Recognizing that trauma is inflicted helped Ebony understand that she can triumph over it and in the following quote; she explains her strategies for maintaining her sanity:

No matter what is happening to me at school, I keep my cousin's wedding picture close. I have it in my locker at school; it reminds me where I am going because I have my goals.

For Ebony, staying focused on her goals was aided by a picture that reminded her of her dream for herself and kept her going. This speaks to the need for Black youth to see representations of positives and possibilities, not negative pathologizing media images.

Meaning-making involved jettisoning self-blame and led to self-discovery, purpose, and mission as recognition enhanced their capacity for empathy. In this regards, Adaobi said:

I began to understand why some students flunk. I always thought they were losers, but I realized I had been hiding my own pain in order to be accepted. I want to be a principal and hire many Black teachers and make things different for Black students.

This sense of mission was not just about maximizing their own potential but also to ensure others do not endure similar fate and awareness of their agency as change catalysts. Although Black African youth often do not consider themselves as entitled as their white peers, connections to a larger reality helped them resist injustice as they recognize injustice and the fact that they too have rights, they balked at being expected to put up with maltreatment

Princess described an incident where she spoke up at school:

The custodian cleaned the graffiti and the principal felt that once it is cleaned that's all. I said, the custodian did not write it and he cannot clean it from my mind. I felt like, no justice.

Princess returned to school after nasty things were written on her locker. In her absence, the school got the custodian to clean it. She asserted herself, confronting the authorities about the injustice of their failure to investigate and identify the culprit and making.

At other times, the youth used humour, feigned ignorance, played along, or were disruptive to disarm their oppressors. They were initially hesitant to disclose their resistance strategies; however, the rapport, comfort, and trust attained helped them start somewhat apologetically to talk about tricks and jokes which showed their wit and insights

Zainab remembered and with a chuckle, narrated some of her escapades:

Sometimes we got sneaky too. I am not saying we were angels. They were making us crazy. One day I just took her picture and photo shopped it onto a Black Lives Matter protest.

She begged me not to post it. I said, "You want to be my brother's girlfriend, then be ready for this or butt out."

Nana resented the attention White girls paid to her brother which served to distract him from his goals. Her way of doing something about it was to confront the White girls as described above reflecting her loyalty, concerns, and political awareness. This shows that although Waterloo region residents may think Black Lives Matter movement is of no consequence in the region, to the youth, it was personal and also informed their politicization.

In addition to these tactics, some students capitalized on the ignorance of the dominant population about Africans.

Thembe spoke of testing the knowledge or ignorance of teachers and peers and this gave them some comic relief and edge as they were not limited to one reality but could access resources unknown to the majority as they realized the school community had hardly any knowledge or awareness about the continent:

I made up stories about Africa, they believed all the stuff about me becoming king of my tribe and if only they knew the meaning of the words I told them, I almost died laughing.

The youth spoke of escapades such as the one above and some said they would never tell their parents these things, but it demonstrated their wit, humour, courage. Their feeling safe to share these stories in the presence of elders and the hearty laughter of all present was great for trust building as they were able to overcome the tendency to equate the researchers with their parents who may worry about the repercussions of such actions. It was mostly those who were already out of the high school system that chose to share but the others laughed, nodded their heads, or otherwise showed their support. Their resistance is not only directed at school but at fear exhibited by parents and society's expectation that they be perfect while being oppressed.

They resisted, humanized themselves and found ways of having fun at the expense of the system without letting on at home, demonstrating tactical abilities and leadership potential.

Leadership

The youth's narratives about displaying their self-advocacy aptitude enabled their cultural capital to be recognized by the schools which enabled them to take on leadership roles.

Miriam spoke of how her advocacy for Black history in her class became school-wide:

My mom tells African stories at the Latitudes festival in Kitchener, I asked her to do storytelling in my class, the teacher was reluctant, but she showed him her portfolio and he let her come. I felt so proud and we now have annual Black history month event.

The youth demonstrated leadership, not from acting white but contributing from their unique heritage and cultural knowledge relying on their parents as resource persons, in this case, a mother who is a talented storyteller and author who nonetheless only gained access because of her portfolio.

This speaks to the value of gaining acceptance in one's own community as a springboard for accessing other spheres. For instance, the youth sense of belonging in their community and extended family helped them to understand that the hatred of others towards their Black skins was not their responsibility.

This insight freed them to focus on their own goals as illustrated in Zainab's quote:

We organized a multicultural club, but no teacher helped us, so people called us the orphan club. I continued leading and I took the club to the annual day for the elimination of racism at Kitchener City Hall, and everybody saw our African heritage on display which made me proud.

Although it was not always easy, the struggles they surmounted, their resilience and persistence were made even more remarkable and demonstrated the indomitable spirit of Black Africans through history. Zainab was undeterred by her club being called the orphan club and the youth were their own best advocates. Supported by parents and allies who believed in them, they nurtured their African core, connecting to, and giving back to their communities.

Angel's story below shows the importance of operating from a healthy empowered self, even in university; she found that she needed to educate peers about her realities:

I made a video for my presentation, I took pictures of tall buildings in Africa, but they wanted "real African pictures." I then made a slideshow with photos of children in the North and said, "This is Canada where, kids live in disease, no water, no power, no decent houses, this is Canada." they said, "this is not Canada; that is the Aboriginal reserves, not all of Canada"

The above quote juxtaposes the single-story usually presented about Africa with Canada's positive global image which ignores the realities of First nation's people. The class considered the portrayal of the Northern Canada's reserves as representative of Canada inaccurate and this Black youth drove home the point that Africa has slums, cities, squalor, poverty, and affluence.

Faith and hope

Faith tends to play an important role in the lives of Black Africans and it was no different for these youth. Their comments show that faith has given them hope through their journey in the school system in Waterloo Region as exemplified by Soyinka:

It was like modern-day slavery, so the next semester, I said, I have my God; I have my family; God will help me. I spent more time on my school work, went to youth group at church, I was in school council, but it was no more than that, just my God and me really.

Faith provided a moral compass and succor. It is known that people often look to higher powers even more when facing injustice. It is not unlikely that the faith of their parents and the Black community generally were further activated by their experiences in Canada and passed on to the children. Kwame who earlier said he came from a Christian family had this to say:

For Kwame, his faith was a personal barometer, so although his teacher thought he enjoyed the attention, his internal conscience had mixed feelings, and he desired to escape, finding that it was a Christian school that aligned better with his faith convictions.

Faith meant different things to each youth, some spoke about forming a band, singing Diaspora music, as well as songs of freedom, faith, and hope. They reported that varied activities helped them by giving them acceptable outlets for their emotions and making them feel close to God, hopeful and comforted.

Others spoke of visual and other reminders of God and faith including their names and Maya said her name conveyed a message to her all day long:

Knowing the meaning of my name; my name is a prayer; my parents' prayers for me, their hopes, and aspirations, it gives me hope and comforts me when they say the full name.

The youth spoke of connections to the significance of their names. Those who did not know the meaning of their names purposed to find out and some like Maya loved the endearing ways parents using their full name or added their middle name.

Faith in community was also valued by the youth as they talked about receiving tangible help, counsel, prayers, and comfort, and generally a place to belong and others to lean on.

Adaobi said having that support helped her when she took a year off from school:

My mom's friend at church gave me Bible verses and showed me God loves me till I was able to overcome the depression and go back to school. God is a big part of me being here today

The faith of parents, personal convictions, family significance, names, community, and support from like-minded people helped the youth process their hurt, stay grounded, provide spiritual answers to life's major questions about identity and significance.

Soyinka who had left high without graduating spoke about leaving school for his sanity and how his faith buoyed him up:

I left because the temptations were too much, I didn't want to leave but teachers think bad about you every day. They don't want you to do well, make you angry all the time. Then there are drugs and fights and too many things. I could have done what I will regret. A teacher told lies about me; I said my God knows, the school just thinks I am a criminal. Every day I felt like shouting, I am not! Can't you see? I was thinking and praying and just to be alive, I had to leave the school and I got a job. It was not easy with my parents, they were disappointed, but I am alive and now I am a foreman in charge of people and I will return to school because now the school cannot do anything to me again, God really helped me.

Conclusion

The rich findings of this study shed light on the alienation Black youth face. One youth said, "*it is not one thing, it is everything*" as alienation pervades all aspects of their lives. In the absence of institutionalized supports, youth were helped by parents, extended family, faith, and community connections whose support enabled them to displaying agency and resolve.

Summary of Findings

The study demonstrated a powerful combination of plural epistemology (the African and indigenous ways of knowing to inform western research paradigms. The study uses critical race theory and Afrocentric theory to examine the school experiences of youth in the Waterloo region. I integrate these theories to unpack euphemisms and ideology that render power- and are

legitimized as discourses with which to understand the everyday school behavior of Black students with the intent of disrupting normalized way of ‘writing’ Black youth in schools.

A significant contribution of this research is the development of the concept of “taking a sanity break”. This powerful finding arrived at through the integration of the youth voices with the literature illustrates the complexities of lived experiences ignored by simplistic hegemonic discourses. The sanity break concept re-writes and rights the conversation about Black students’ exit from school system. The youth are aware of the impact of racial trauma and oppressions in the school system and their own possible reactions - and of the consequences of reacting. They therefore make the conscious decisions to remove their bodies from a system they considered oppressive – even if temporarily, to avoid shame to their families – and because the school system presents Black youth with a “take it or leave it” scenario as described in **chapter four**

A major methodology –linked finding is that identity and politics of mental health care providers are important determinants of who gets attended to, when and where. The absence of Black youth in a large mental health youth-serving agency (**chapter three**), knowledge of, and inability to interrogate what it means to absent Black kids in some spaces is about representation. The alternative to prevention or early interventions is the designation of Black students as “at risk” youth but any subsequent involvement in the criminal justice system is constructed as due to proclivity of their race without examining the politics of representation. Eurocentric, cultural, and ideological definitions of spaces ignore invisible structures of power apparent to the marginalized in “neutral” spaces such as coffee shops which render them culturally unsafe and were found to be inappropriate for participant recruitment in this study.

- 1) Black youth in this study conceptualize exiting school in response to the racial slurs, bullying, harsh punishments, and low expectations they face at school as temporary “sanity breaks”, deviating from passive, finalistic notions of “drop out” or “pushout”
- 2) All but two of the youth participants in the study had never been taught by a Black teacher and all the youth experienced the curriculum as unrepresentative and non inclusive of Black or African knowledge or their ontological realities
- 6) The youth described opportunity gaps in their education, ability of school staff and services to meet their needs, such as recognizing and responding to injustice experienced by marginalized students
- 7) The perception that the school was ill-equipped to address issues led to under-reporting of their experiences of alienation or discrimination
- 8) In addition to lack of ability, the youth also believe the schools lack a framework for interrogating bias as they reported staff; teachers and administrators did not listen, disbelieved them and failed to address concerns justly or in culturally responsive manners, thus demonstrating unexamined bias and ethnocentrism
- 9) Parents and youth experience racism at school and the youth are particularly triggered when their parents are belittled
- 10) As a result of these alienating experiences, the youth suffer adverse physical, social, and psychological health impacts with lingering effects on their identity development
- 11) There is a huge role for social workers but schools lack proactive social work support as social workers are seen as attendance officers and custodians of the social order
- 12) Males and females experience alienation but respond along gendered lines performing masculinity and femininity

- 13) Race, class, and gender intersect but race supersedes other factors in their alienation
- 14) Youth are supported by parents, extended family, faith, and community connections, thriving against the odds, through hopes, aspirations, self-determination, and resilience
- 15) Black youth are not passive, they wrestle with choices, leadership, friendships, identity, and their general lived realities as well as language, euphemisms and tensions of contradictions and expectations. They demonstrate significant awareness of how they are portrayed, and seen by the media, teachers, peers, police, and the larger society. The awareness and understanding of the consequences of stereotypes and oppressions at personal, cultural and structural levels informs their meaning making and decisions causing them to deploy their double consciousness in all interactions with the Eurocentric systems and institutions.

Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings

The Afrocentric posture of this study and use of dialogic oral methods (Anucha,2007) outlined in **chapter three** enabled me to elicit rich findings and structural analysis that provides insights into the existence of racism, the varied manifestations, and impacts but also sheds light

on the aspirations, hopes, and resistance and meaning-making of the youth. In this UN decade for people of African origin, this study has tremendous potential to inform further research with broader methodological and theoretical examinations of the experiences of all Black populations from varied perspectives. Critical analysis of the youth stories in this research was achieved by using the theoretical frameworks identified in **chapter two** to interpret, distill and contemplate new theorization based on emerging patterns found in **chapter four**. The overarching ideas in the youth narratives are discussed conceptually using Afrocentric and critical race theory and building on the scholarship of decolonizing scholars to theorize about links between race, Whiteness, schooling, and health of Black African youth in Waterloo region.

Some of my conceptualizations challenge established dictums about Black youth and their educational motivation, access, attendance, and achievement. Joining the debates about drop out or push out of Black youth in Canadian schools, I offer new postulations informed by a robust view of Black African youth as agents and subjects, not mere objects. According to Dlamini, (2015) youth play crucial roles as social change catalysts and actively challenged South African apartheid regime and continue to resist hegemonic constructions focused on racial proclivity that deny their social capital. In explaining Black youth behaviour, the psychological impacts of the repressive systems they face are ignored while mental health considerations are activated for White youth. The relationship between alienation and health or wellbeing of Black youth including mental health is complex as mental health treatment is denied Black youth but a focus on their mental health may lead to greater violation of their human rights, erosion of agency and voice which can put already marginalized youth at greater risk. This study contributes to extant literature and a common thread of unmasking of hegemony through interrogation of whiteness runs through the study as summarised in the following four key areas:

- 1) Schooling out of Place: Geographies of race and Belonging in Waterloo region
- 2) Dropping the Dropout Discourse: Euphemisms and Elusiveness
- 3) The Mental Health or Mental illness dilemma
- 4) Transferring the White Burden back to its creators

Schooling out of place

As noted in **chapter two**, poor access of Black youth to post-secondary education (Block & Galabuzi, 2011) and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system (Anucha, 2013; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2012) are of utmost concern to the Black community. It is no new problem as McMurtry and Curling (2008) reported findings similar to the Lewis (1992) report which highlighted that anti-Black racism was responsible for criminalizing and slamming the doors of the school system against Black youth. These eminent Canadians were commissioned to recommend solutions to the problems and although they emphasized the imperative of policy interventions and targeted resources, sadly, the findings of this dissertation study reported in **chapter four** show that racism remains pervasive and persistent. This creates opportunity gaps in the education of Black youth who feel they are schooling-out of place in Waterloo region.

Race-based data- there is a dearth of data on the rate of “Black youth exiting the Waterloo region school system as Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) has not commenced collection of race-based data. It is however clear from the findings in **chapter four**, that there is a distinct feeling among the youth that they are regarded as aliens, not welcomed or safe. They are not included, and they are unrepresented in school staffing, curriculum, and policies. Without the collection of race data, WRDSB is unaware how many Black students they serve, who they are, what cultural capital they can contribute if harnessed, and how to integrate

and serve them best. It is apparently not even considered necessary as the dominant discourse is that of pathology, criminality and needs, but services thrown at needs created by society serve to assuage White guilt, foster dependency, reinforce White supremacy and enables the dominant to continue to benefit from socially constructed hierarchies.

The resistance to collecting race data demonstrates whose interest this narrative serves. Apprehension over how the data would be used and by whom drives the board's decision to not collect the data and signals self-interest on the part of those who wield power in the school system. The fear of losing control over what is known is accompanied by lack of concern for Black youth who are unacknowledged as they travail through trauma daily in schools that they perceive as meant for their White counterparts. In the absence of relevant data, schools do not respond to the region's demographic shifts, Black youth continue to fall through the cracks, but they and their parents get blamed for any negative outcomes. Teachers expressed they wished they could take Black children and give them a better life, ignoring positive child and parent attributes and succumbing to the risk of risk that creates moral panic and fear unnecessarily. This reflects Eurocentric ability to obfuscate the reality of others and to define them in self-serving ways. There are few, if any meaningful options to exit the oppressive terrain without being demonized. Authorities ignore what is happening to them at school, assuming what works for White students is universal and will work for all but the lazy and unmotivated. This speaks to power and domination, reminiscent of slavery because youth are mandated to be in school which has become a site of oppression, where they lose their freedoms but agitations for alternative schooling models are labeled regressive (Hampton, 2010), making youth feel trapped.

Toronto District School Board collects race-based data and is now phasing out the ugly practise of streaming which disparately affected Black youth (The Globe and Mail, September 7,

2017). It is apparent that collecting race-based data illuminates the inequity that certain populations face and requires schools to focus on systemic transformation. Reluctance to the collection of data shows lack of willingness to address discomfort, embrace diversity, adapt or move away from assimilationist thinking that demands acquiescence from visible minority learners. Integration of their worldviews, ideas, parents, culture, and epistemology would address the alienation Black youth face and communicate that their embodied presence is valued, and education is not coloured.

This makes Critical race theory (CRT) salient as a theory that emphasizes radical change, enabling non-collection of race data to be recognized as not just an innocuous omission. The west sought what Africa had, taking its assets and people who never chose to be uprooted and hauled away and the belief that people can be used and discarded at will is problematic. Today, Canada admits people of African origin only because it needs them for economic stimulation of small cities and population growth (Statistics Canada, March 3, 2017). Teachers who are afraid of the Black youth they are paid to teach have a mental block to unlearn. Black male youth said that when White girls cry, they can begin to pack their things as they will be sent to the office, ending their learning for that day. Frankenberg (1992) asserted that the fear white women have of Black men is an inversion of reality that disguises dislike of Black men. She deduced that White girls' fear was learned from their mothers. Respondents in this study also felt their peers learned from teachers and staff that racism was non-punishable, lacked perpetrators and its victims are silenced as schools required Black students to adduce evidence for racism, catering to white fragility and missing valuable teachable moments to promote inclusion.

These attitudes protect power from action and accountability, therefore the ministry of education directive that all school boards in Ontario commence collecting data on hiring,

suspensions, and streaming is a welcome one. Making the data public will make plain the relationships of disadvantage and differential outcomes to specific student groups. This aligns with the Ontario Equity strategy (2009) that emphasizes the importance of equitable, culturally relevant education which has not been actualized in Waterloo region from the accounts of participants in this study. Disseminating the findings in **chapter four** broadly will avert isolation, self-blame, internalized oppression, withdrawal, or in-group hostility which are all ways oppressed people commonly respond to oppression (Mullaly, 2010).

Making Black youth part of Waterloo region's future - Youth are generally regarded as the future of any nation, but Black African youth needs, rights, and voices are currently excluded from the future envisaged for the region. Waterloo region has above national rates of hate crimes motivated by race (Flanagan, CTV Kitchener, June 13, 2017), led Canada in reported hate crimes per capita in 2011 (CBC, April 2016), and recorded 51 hate crimes in 2015, an 82 percent increase over 2014, and nearly triple the number seen in 2013 (Statistics Canada, 2016). Also, Waterloo Regional Police are four times more likely to stop Black people to record names without laying a charge (Bueckert, Sharkey, CBC News, April 7, 2016). These are grave statistics for a small community touted as an intelligent community, whose quiet, serene image masks the conservative racist regime under which Black youth toil daily. These data and findings reflect Waterloo region residents' attitudes toward Blacks as school policies and actions are not isolated from the geographies in which they are situated. Police services acknowledgment of problems in its approaches and the release of their data must be emulated by the school board, child welfare, and other agencies to ensure transparency.

Black teachers and decolonized education. If all teachers are White, it suggests that Blacks are unworthy of teaching White students or can only teach in Afrocentric schools. This

implies the inferiority of the teachers, their knowledge, the Afrocentric schools and non-White students by suggesting White students' needs are more important than those of other students. In the absence of Black teachers who share similar colonial history with the Black students and who can validate their experiences, ahistorical pathologizing discourses are not challenged. The attempts of White teachers produced discourses of rescuing and saving Black youth from their parents or community. Lack of awareness about power and privilege reduced teachers' ability to embrace decolonized curriculum and made them their helping less credible as Black youth continued to feel unsafe and misunderstood. On the other hand, teachers of African origin as well as parents and elders have much to offer ontologically and epistemologically to broadening the curriculum and developing globally minded learners, staff, and teachers.

Afrocentric theory rejects current social structuring, centering the African experience in recognition of the fact that people align their aspirations with what is presented as an objective reality which makes it necessary to have Black African teachers in public schools. In this vein, recent findings by Hart, Lindsay, and Papageorge (2017) that having just one Black teacher in public school significantly impacts Black students' (especially the males) to stay in school and graduate, is timely. It is absolutely essential that what students see at school supports the region's global image as well as the bill of rights and freedoms and the United Nations human rights. It is particularly imperative in this United Nations decade for people of African origin which is yet to be acknowledged by Canada. The above study bears out what the Black community have always known that their youth do not disengage for lack of ability but because schools lack cultural or practical relevance for them. The authors state that having one Black teacher is a small step that makes a great difference and does not require huge funds. The youth who had lived in bigger cities abhorred both the racist behaviour and its denial of differences between Waterloo region

and the GTA such as non-representativeness of the schools' upper hierarchy and curriculum. The students felt disadvantaged compared to both White counterparts in the region and Black peers in the GTA. Representation is important because ideas of inevitability and essentialization conspire to limit imagination, opportunities, and contributions that youth can make within the region and, in relegating the youth; the region robs itself as many leave, in order to be actualized.

Diverse representation expands imagination expands and sheds light on, structural oppression which in turn averts internalized oppression (Mullaly, 2010). The notion that certain teachers have accents reflects new racism (Pun, 2009), White teachers' accents are normalized but Black teachers are misfits, ignoring the reality that some, born and raised in Canada, have no African accent, but even if they did, assuming teachers only teach White students erases the many non-White learners whose needs may be best served by having teachers who speak like them. This validates the importance, relevance, and timeliness of my study in Waterloo region for the vast majority of Waterloo region Black youth. The research sought to understand how youth make meaning of their experiences in Waterloo region, not on what is wrong with them. In this study, those for whom the region is a secondary destination rejected the region's flawed narratives and helped to provide others with alternative perspectives and broadened imagination thus jettisoning limits on what is deemed achievable. Tools of ideological oppression can be resisted through making other experiences visible. The Black population is not homogenous and their experiences as racialized people in smaller cities are complex and diverse. As noted in **chapter two**, Waterloo Region's global reputation as a welcoming space (Walton-Roberts, 2009) brings many Black African families to the region but expectations are dashed when they experience racism in a place portrayed as a sanctuary. The experience of racialization created "crucible moments (Kendal 2012). The incongruence is apparent as Afrocentric schools are

derided as proponents of regression, but public schools fail to hire Black teachers and Black students are invisibilized and not regarded as worthy (bell hooks, 2014). Interviewees in Frankenberg's (1993) study ignored the Black nannies that raised, clothed, and fed them in their "all white" homes and she concluded that it was conceptually rather than physically that the Black women were absent. In the same way, Blacks are conceptually absented but physically present and singled out for policing and scrutiny by the White gaze. Pun (2009) describes the cultural competency that profiles others as "new racism" which deploys labeling, profiling, and examination to define and judge the other.

Racist attitudes and actions are not unintended or accidental, they perpetuate the status quo and benefit those who condone them, because "unearned privilege can look like strength when it is, in fact, permission to escape or to dominate" (McIntosh 1989, p. 4). Interviewees in Frankenberg's (1992) study were not evil but all they had to do was take for granted the privilege, power, and visibility they benefited from without questioning. McIntosh goes on to say "We might at least start by distinguishing between positive advantages which we can work to spread, and negative types of advantages which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies (1989, p. 4). Distinctions are necessary because profiling, stereotyping, or making assumptions about people is not the same as actually knowing them. Blacks are considered known based on the assumptions that they are always clients or objects to be pitied, punished, or rescued, making being Black a dis-ability. This is not lost on the Black young women in this study who resolve not to bring Black children into the world. Poverty is ascribed to the other, charity is conceived of as unidirectional and Black capital is devalued which explains why schools fail to incorporate the cultural capital of Blacks into the curriculum as reported in **chapter four** because they cannot integrate what they denigrate.

Black youth and their parents believed Waterloo region would be a sanctuary but found their post-immigration trauma harder more horrendous even though some had gone through war and faced other hardship in bigger urban centers. The region's global reputation breeds idealistic expectations, although immigration policies viewing Africans as "undesirable" were replaced, the reality has not changed because attitudes in small communities have not kept pace with new policies (James et al., 2010), which heightens perceptions of deprivation in an otherwise accepting, peaceful community. Using an African lens, Wilson and Habecker (2008) stated that "Africans tend to perceive capital cities as centers for business, culture, and education as they are in many of their home countries" (p. 217). This, in turn, leads to higher diversity in metropolitan areas and more social support networks compared to Waterloo region where supports are few and youth efforts to gather for mutual support are misunderstood, as illustrated in **chapter four**. These issues are ignored in secondary immigration discourses that focus on benefits to the small cities with no mention of the impact of separation from social supports and ethnic affiliations that can be found in larger cities. Against the evidence of their own lived experiences, society insists Eurocentric habits and experiences are "regular". Bourdieu (1994) adds that "[S]timuli do not exist...in their objective truth, as conditional, conventional triggers, acting only on condition that they encounter agents conditioned to recognize them" (Bourdieu 1994, p. 278). Society seeks to "objectively" regulate others. Stranger discourse (Ahmed, 2000; Thobani, 2007) recognizes unspoken rules and framing of "the other" as conformity is elevated. Some youth begged to be taken back to Toronto as their needs remained unrequited. Canada's bid to foster economic growth in small cities admits more Africans without attending to their, health and belonging needs which are necessary to avert post-migratory stressors and support the diverse small cities court (Dei, 2007).

Taking a Sanity Break

Schooling does not occur in a vacuum, as seen in **chapter two**. Researchers underscore the need for scholarship in smaller Canadian communities because of the tendency to deny the racism by focusing on neighbouring USA cities (Dlamini et al., 2009) or bigger cities (James et al., 2017). They emphasize the need to critically examine hegemonic discourses and euphemisms that create resistance if left unexamined (Giroux, 1983). The term “drop out” is one such term as it does not acknowledge the many reasons Black and African students leave school (Ogbu, 1970). Some male students left school for practical reasons, as they saw no prospects of succeeding in the school system or needed to support their families (Dei et al., 2005). In **chapter four** the youth alluded to reasons why some join gangs, racism is ontologically common to all Black people, but meaning-making responses vary significantly. Dei et al, (2005) found that some youth leave the school system in reaction to racism, to support family, avoid shaming their families or to seek protection of gangs against police brutality. Essentialist discourse cannot contemplate the nobility of their motives, but this study honours their meaning-making processes as their reactions do not create the problem but only respond to its irrational expectations, myths, and assumptions. The young woman described gentle, smart but very misunderstood brothers who are bullied, heavily scrutinized, and streamed into non-academic or behavioural programs which they resist because they believe they do not belong there.

As the schools already conveyed the impression that they had to “take it or leave it” the youth were not supported or accommodated as they wrestled with their decision to leave. Some youth realizing the school offered them nothing, did not even wait for the school to push them out but chose to escape for their sanity because of the incongruence of being deprived while living in a land of freedom, rights, and opportunities. For males, patriarchal notions complicate

their experience of helplessness, creating anger and agony. Discourses of criminality, public safety, and hypersexuality divert attention from systemic barriers. Ladson Billings (1995) noted that “The African...student wearing a hat in class or baggy pants may be sanctioned for clothing choices rather than specific behaviors. School is perceived as a place where African...students cannot [“be themselves.”] (p. 161).

They are indiscriminately suspended or expelled (Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Sciba et al. 2002). When they get tired of self-governing and exit the system they are labeled dropouts but if they stay they are criminalized and pathologized as intrinsically deviant. The zero-tolerance policies enacted in the early 2000s were replaced by multiculturalism and diversity policies, but racialized students continue to be disproportionately represented among those who are pushed out. Policies are renamed but radical social change and recognition of discursive racism (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1993; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2001) is needed to challenge “post-racial” discourse which assumes that while race may have once have affected racialized people, its effects have ceased. Persistence of racist stereotypes led to youth in this study being accused of planning criminal activities if they sought out peer support. Kubilene, Chung Yan, Kuwee-Kumsa & Burmana (2014) noted that subtle racism is prevalent at school and youth feel trapped and silenced by policies that ignore subtle racism (Kubilene et al., 2014)

Many African parents and children self- govern in adherence to Neoliberal notions of individual responsibility and meritocracy (McIntosh, 1989), seeing their value in terms of ability to fit into the internal working of a system that is not designed to facilitate their success. The youth spoke of desiring a better tomorrow, to escape the treatment meted out to their parents by the system but they also faced barriers. Lack of success in the school system was not due to inability, individual intellectual or moral failure but systemic disengagement and alienation.

Morgenshtern (2012) did not study Black Africans but speaking of the Russian Jewish couples she studied, she noted that “although in a few instances the participants identified systemic barriers ... they still constructed the narrative of individual responsibility” (p. 244). She added that the couples struggled with the idea of being seen as using systemic barriers as an excuse for failing. Many Black males also, not wanting to be seen as playing the race card sought avenues where they felt they could succeed. Narratives of failure as caused by laziness resulted in striving to prove the system works for them even though it clearly discriminates against them.

Some youth in this study chose to take what I call “sanity breaks” from school because they expressed that they left for their sanity when the racism became undeniable. Sanity breaks allowed them to recalibrate and decide if remaining at school was worthwhile but the practice of streaming in schools also led to a desire to get out of what they perceived as a dead end. Biased opinions about their ability led to them being propelled towards non academic careers and away from college and university paths. Ontario education Minister Hunter, talking about the evils of streaming was quoted as saying “grade 9 is a critical year where students can explore their pathways, ...we do not want it to be a year where students become demotivated” (The Star.com, Sept 7, 2017). The media ignore Black youth exiting the school system in response to abuse even though some of the youth said they would either be dead or in jail, if they had remained in the school. The media construes leaving school as laziness, lack of motivation or propensity towards gangs and crime, without seeing the reasoned survival tactic these youth use to stay alive and out of jail. I learned that anguished youth are not “dropping out” but devising self-preserving strategies. One participant went to Africa in search of his identity and credits his grandparents and extended family with helping him return to face university education in Canada. Another youth stayed home after her first year of university because she dreaded the thought of more

years in school and realized she had to take time to heal from the trauma she faced in high school. Dialectics that juxtapose staying or leaving school, males and females, good and bad ignore the self-efficacy in various youth responses to racism or the connections between strategies of health and resistance.

The term “drop out” suggests a passive occurrence but the youth do not drop like ripened fruit and from their narratives, we learn what buoys them up and gain insight into what can help prevent their “dropping out”. The meaning-making process driving the phenomenon wrongly dubbed “dropping out” has not been documented, but contrary to media portrayals (Wortley, 2000) this study indicates that some youth leave school to escape harm or to explore more suitable avenues of success outside the school system. The chances of gaining employable skills or accessing post-secondary education are limited for those in English as a Second Language stream. The current structure makes some of them leave because the schools had written them off and left them dispirited. I agree with Dei et al.’s (1995) assertion that Black youth do not drop out, but are pushed out; but I argue they do not just get pushed out; they wrestle and strategize to stay healthy, safe and free from bullying. Achieving these goals sometimes meant having to make a conscious informed choice to not resist the push or to remove themselves from the site of abuse. The agonized wrestling, interrogating White privilege, and their processes of evaluating options for identity and sanity is absent in the literature. Regardless of why they leave, their thoughtfulness brings into question simplistic binaries of good and bad students.

Dei et al. (1995) is an extensive study on the issue of “drop out” found that parent powerlessness, over-trusting the system, Eurocentric curriculum, and absence of Black teachers or cultural support contributed to Black youth leaving school. Those who stayed in school did so

for reasons such as seeing no other option, to prove a point, having family members who had triumphed, parents' insistence, empathic teachers, as well faith and community support that mitigated the effects of racism. The same study found that high self-esteem was a motivating factor for youth who believed they deserve better and decided to leave school. "An ability to see the big picture gave the students particular insight into the school process" (Dei et al., 2005, p. 146). Youth who recognized that the system 's low expectations and steering into non-academic stream was working against them demonstrated agency and self-determination in leaving

Some other youth resisted by staying in school, deploying humour, playing on the quirks of authorities and gatekeepers which require wits, intellect, discernment, and optimism. Some also skipped school to attend cultural events such as the Mandela memorial or chose works like that of Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka for presentations. The Black African youth were not lazy, simple, unthinking or brutish. They understood the master's house but also strove to build a new one and practiced thinking at a higher level. Dei et al. (2007) tell of two respondents preparing for a sociology examination who came to a practice question on parenting. One advised the other student to answer the way white people raise their children. This story shows Black youth saw that others do not have to grapple with double consciousness because singular epistemology is normalized and presented as universal thereby relegating broadened and contextualized learning. Black youth on the other hand have to adopt double consciousness to survive the pitfalls of racially structural divides. The youth realized the master's tools only exclude them through colonized education and Eurocentric teachers, so they ran from the school, not as a meaningless activity but chose to "run to Africa" (Asante, 2000) to wrest their mental health away from the grip of unrelenting racial trauma. The non-inclusive curriculum is a school risk factor that marginalizes Black African youth (Dei & Rummens, 2014).

Those who acquiesced and those who resisted equally reported they were abused and maltreated. Both Black males and females experience racial trauma and Pollack (2003) discusses the de-contextualization of Black women's experiences including their criminalization. Context is important in examining why Black women are in jail or why some Black youth exit the school system in order to be healthy, safe or alive. It has been found that in America and Canada, women many of whom are coloured are incarcerated for nonviolent crimes, have experienced abuse as children or adults as well as poverty (Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2001; Maeve, 1999) but dominant discourse individualizes their offending by shifting focus away from root factors that afflict both males and females, those in school and those who left (Lorde, 1988, Crenshaw, 1989)

Afrocentric ideologies enable understanding of how Black women negotiate the duality of gender and race as they navigate demands of Western assumptions. As Asante (2012) noted in his book "Running Toward Africa" the solution is not about being less but more African. In other words, not just resisting Eurocentrism but developing a wholesome authentic African identity. Success in the spirit of African collectivism includes the idea of "getting there together". Although White people may also be impacted by factors such as class, Black people's class is often less visible, and they cannot take for granted that they are expected to succeed, or that they are innocent until proven guilty or of respectable pedigree. Race is a visible marker or master status (Mullaly, 2010) and always in the reckoning even when class, nationality, immigrant status and other factors are unknown. This explains why rich Blacks, celebrities, professors experience carding or profiling but when their class, status, education, or fame becomes known, it is a protective factor, unlike other Blacks who are vulnerable in plural ways including the ways a poor White person would be.

As already noted, hegemonic definitions of success and achievement can become a trap, re-inscribing inferiority, requiring permission from the dominant and engendering pressure from desperate and frustrated parents of Black youth. The system traumatizes both parents and youth and other frameworks just do not capture the extra work Blacks must do to show up at school or work or to parent every day. Afrocentrism illuminates the African experience as a human one as parents have to do more than teach reading writing and arithmetic, they must teach racism and responses to being profiled and stopped by the police. As reported in the Star.com, April 24, 2017, some schools in Toronto are leading the way with eliminating streaming and introducing after-school tutoring to address disparities y created by the practice and have begun to report an increase in pass rates. One must then ask if it was lack of ability or skewed policies and practices emanating from racial attitudes that created the original achievement gap.

Euphemisms and Elusive Success

As de Broucker (2005) notes: “[W]idespread participation of people of all socio-economic backgrounds in post-secondary education can reduce economic disparities and promote social cohesion” (p. 2). Better engagement can help any community reduce educational disparity; prevent criminality and address poverty (Roots of Violence Report 2008). Lewis states “it is Black students who are being inappropriately streamed in schools; it is Black kids who are disproportionately dropping out,” thus indicting anti-Black racism (1992, p.2). Scholarship acknowledges culturally validating education has the ability to enhance access by engaging learners of varied cultures (Asante, 1990; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1992). The Ontario education strategy (2009) says “[I]f we are to succeed, we must draw on our experience and on research that tells us that student achievement will improve when barriers to inclusion are

identified and removed and when all students are respected and see themselves reflected in their learning and their environment” (Kathleen Wynne, 2009, Para, 4). In previous eras, Jewish people, Irish, and Italians were the “other” and have been embraced but we must not stop until all groups are included. Barrier-free learning for all is important because all stand to gain from safe, accepting, and inclusive schools where success includes rather than excludes and is attainable for all.

Who may succeed, how, when, and where, as well as how it is measured, reported, and represented is critical. Wortley (2000) found that positive stories about Blacks were obscurely placed in newspapers. Participants in this research also reported that teachers are loathed to compliment them when they do well and surmised that teachers expect them to fail.

Racism was also evident as teachers held Black parents suspect when their children did well at school. The idea that Black parents cannot do right because they are already judged was expressed as students wondered why teachers thought that they deserve better homes even when and particularly because they were doing well at school. What makes a home “better” and why did teachers assume Black families are incapable of helping their children sustain the successes they helped them achieve in the first place? It makes sense that if Black parents are blamed when their children do not do well, they should be commended when they succeed but this was not the experience of the students in this study.

The school system writes off a whole group of parents because of their colour or the menial “survival jobs” they currently do without knowledge of their prior learning, professions, and abilities. “Black children... may start kindergarten feeling confident and excited to learn, but too many are “gradually worn down” by schools that stream them into applied courses and suspend them at much higher rates than other students (Andrea Gordon, The Star .com, April

2004). Success has become a euphemism or parameter of exclusion instead of an objective measure. Issues with any family should be judged on their merit regardless of race. Some Black African families certainly require intervention but when 42 percent of black students had been suspended at least once during high school compared with 18 percent of white students and 15 percent of other racial groups (TDSB, 2017) and half of all suspensions are Black youth, the system must examine how it undermines the success of certain youth. Bias and stereotypes about what family is worthy of being supported lead to a preponderance of Black children in care which has led to calls for a system that interprets and responds wholesomely to African children and families (African child welfare project, 2017). School staff requires more self-awareness and cultural training in order to respond humanely to African children without believing they are automatically in need of protection. It appears the system believes Black children must be protected from their parents. Disrupting the child's life, removing them from their family, community, and cultural roots to institutions with no continuity of permanent, culturally foundational care can hinder success which can be enhanced by harnessing the capacities of Black parents as partners with the school.

If, as Asante (1991) said, societies socialize their youth to meet the needs of their context and Waterloo region is becoming more diverse as noted in **Chapter two**, it would be in the region's interest to equip learners to be relevant in the emerging society. The manifest goals of cultivating diversity can be achieved by defining success to include an appreciation of the cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) of everyone present in the schools. This would involve imagining Blacks as able to belong and contribute (Walcott, 2011) rather than telling their peers "they have nothing, they are not like us". The use of language is very important as words and labels are used to disenfranchise racialized people. Words are defined to limit the sanctioning of certain

actions. Jiwani (2006) showed that dominant usage of the word “violence” masks its structural roots and ignores discursive violence. In the same way, the word success is layered with value judgments about who may succeed and how it is attained or hindered.

Ogbu (1970) theorized that Black youth disengage from schooling because they resist acting white. Educational disengagement is one of those terms used without interrogation. The Ontario education strategy describes Ontario as the most multicultural province in Canada. As noted in **chapter two**, Black youth are marginalized in Eurocentric systems (Abdi, 2005; Wane, 2004), portrayed as dropouts, gangsters, drug pushers and violent criminals (Scott Wortley, 2002), creating Resistance (Giroux, 2003) to systemic inequity (Dei, 2008; Kuwee-Kumsa, 2013; Walcott 2003). The Ontario Ministry of Education claims it: *“trains students in critical and logical thinking, writing, and oral communication, and acquaints them with principles underlying their own values and beliefs as well as those of other people and traditions”* (Ministry of Education, 2000: 111). This echoes what Afrocentrism values, not that Afrocentrism should replace Eurocentrism, but that epistemicide is unacceptable. There would be no need for Afrocentric schools if “regular” schools accommodate plural epistemologies? The failure of the system to engage Black and African youth by not including, inviting, appreciating or honouring them (Dei and Rhume, 2011) cannot be masked by euphemisms, the context of education is critical to success.

Curriculum - Eurocentric curricular domination preys on Black African’s desperation to succeed at the behest of parents who saw Canadian education as a tool for upward mobility and validation, especially if they had experienced a devaluation of their non-Canadian education and experience. As seen in **chapter three**, African elders are revered for their age and expertise and showcasing successful children became a goal in the new country. The collective parenting

ethos epitomized in the African proverb, “it takes a village to raise a child” was subjugated to meritocracy discourses because hegemony suggests individual choices cause abjection (Giroux, 2003). Anti-intellectuality or disengagement were emphasized and parents were distracted from questioning the nature of the education that Black children receive. Even in Africa, pupils continue to receive an ahistorical colonial education (Baffle, 2016; Dei, 2011; Shizha, 2007). Re-inculcating African epistemology to Africans both in and outside Africa to give back history and culture to African Black youth is, therefore, an urgent task (Dei, 1995, 2000, 2008; James et al, 2010) as success will remain elusive under systems that devalue some learners their mental and cultural capital. The youth in this study reported finding themselves unrepresented in the curriculum and facing obstacles unknown to their counterparts, not lack of ability or commitment as the hindrance to their success. “Just as the soothing balm of ‘multiculturalism’ cannot mask racism, so racism cannot mask its primary target” (Lewis, 1992, p. 2), nor can euphemisms obfuscate the barriers Black African youth face when encountering Eurocentric curriculum (Please see Oba, 2016 for further discussion on creating space for African ways of knowing).

A school does not have to be Afrocentric to be culturally sensitive; pre-, and in-service teachers can learn culturally relevant pedagogy. Comedy (Lindo, 2010), comic novels (Akeeson and Oba, 2017) and arts based creative strategies (Oba, 2016) can enhance the teaching of African history and culture. As defined in **chapter one**, Afrocentric education which affirms African epistemology is distinct from Afrocentric schooling because it is not geographically bound and can be facilitated by educators, parents, and/or social workers in any setting. It does require a commitment to anti-racist practice and to validating their students (Asante, 2003; Dei, 1995; Ladson –Billings, 1995). Youth in this study who experienced Afrocentric pedagogy in the African Association’s after-school homework club reported enhanced confidence and

belonging. As noted in chapter two, opponents protested that the establishment of Afrocentric schools would cause regression from integration into segregation, but it is the lack of integration and inclusivity in the current school system that will cause Canada to regress to segregation. Schools cannot regress from integration because as I understand it, to regress is to suffer a decline away from something that has already been accomplished but we have not yet attained integration. Promoting plural worldviews is seen as an enhancement of the current system in the spirit of integration.

Mental health and wellbeing of Black Youth Matters

The third major theme of this chapter focuses on the health and wellbeing of Black African youth drawing from the findings reported in **chapter four** where linkages between alienation at school and declining health are clearly articulated by participants. They felt stigmatized, resulting in fear, anxiety, and depression in addition to constant worrying about disappointing their parents who reminded them of the many strikes against them in this society. In response to all these, some youth became hyper-vigilant, fearing they would not be able to surmount all the barriers. The desire to escape society's stereotypes of teenage pregnancy, criminality, danger, and violence put the youth under tremendous pressure, feeling they could ill-afford to fail in any way because of the weight of society's judgment and the need to represent their race (McIntosh 1989). If they crumbled under the intense scrutiny, they were not good enough, but they were never going to be considered good enough. Ongoing Success did not hold guarantees as it can only bequeath momentary worth for Blacks as "black is bad" was adjudged to be their natural state.

The youth also noted that when they chose to take time off school to attend to these health effects upon their health, they were not celebrated for their courage and maturity, their actions were not seen as protective factors but rather pathologized. It can be argued that because some Black youth succeed in the school regimes, success is not elusive but the youth reported that they did not escape pain and hurt even though they had acquiesced and gone through the motions in order to graduate. They were what I call “vulnerable successes” only good for validating hegemonic claims that success is not elusive. The youth did not consider themselves any better than their siblings who had left the school because they also experienced wounding from the same system, thus enabling them to empathize with other Black youth.

They did not use the word quit because taking a break is not quitting and they recognize their fellow Blacks were resisting in order to advance because enduring the systemic injustices was hurting them more than it was helping. These injustices are meted out to Blacks, male and female, young and old, community members, parents, and professionals alike as noted in Kumsa et al. (2014). For youth especially, who are at various stages of the formative and developmental cycle, the context of schooling whittles away at their identity and erodes their mental capital

The pressure of social constructions and expectations put Black youth at risk for mental health issues but according to Mfoafo-M'Carthy cited in Ghana News Agency (2017) African cultures consider mental illness a curse. Depression, trauma, and post-traumatic stress are more common than recognized because of cultural beliefs among Africans and the tendency of the West to interdict rather than treat mental health outcomes among Blacks. The World Health Organization defines mental health as (World Health Organization, 2010). As the ability of Black youth to cope with normal life stress is tasked by abnormal complex stresses of racism and alienation seen in **chapter four**, the school and society put them at risk of mental health issues.

Furthermore, having a mental illness poses an even greater risk for persons already facing marginalization and exclusion. Their oppressions are institutionalized, woven into the structures of schools and therefore invisible, so changing how schools run is never contemplated by those in power. Mfoafo-M'Carthy (2011) noted that those suffering from mental illness are often marginalized and deemed unworthy. In this regards, Black youth that as a group are overrepresented in suspensions and expulsions from school, a label of mental illness would only further their disenfranchisement and increase their risk of being targeted for bullying and other racist actions.

The way mental illness would be viewed for White students is different from Black youth who are often punished for what may be mental health issues, because their anger or anxiety or seeking peer support is criminalized, compared to white peers who can expect treatment for mental health issues as part of their invisible knapsacks (McIntosh, 1989). Also, my experience during participant recruitment in chapter three showed that Black youth were not in the client group of the agency providing preventive mental health supports that could enable them to continue their education uninterrupted while attending to their mental health concerns. The agency failed to examine its eligibility criteria thus allowing social constructions of Black youth that limit their access to needed mental health supports. The mental health commission of Canada 2016 stated that Canada depends on diversity as the main economic driver and should invest in their health. They noted that in Ontario "every one dollar spent on mental health promotion produces seven dollars in return" (Mental Health Commission of Canada Oct. 18, 2016). Although immigrants arrive with better levels of mental and physical health than the Canadian-born population, they lose their "healthy immigrant effect" the longer they live in Canada, becoming more at risk for poor mental and physical health outcomes (Mackenzie (2016).

In addition to being put at greater health risk in Canada, Mfoafo-M'Carthy (2010) argues that those who have mental health issues also face higher risk of having their human rights violated, limiting their educational opportunities and further jeopardizing youth health which in time translates to family health, particularly child and maternal health, precarious employment, loss of productivity. All these factors limit health access and maintenance, thereby reinforcing each other and the dire picture is grimmer when criminalized Black youth are considered because the incarcerated face greater level of human rights violations (Mfoafo-M'Carthy, 2010).

In spite of these concerns programs that cater specifically for Black youth are virtually nonexistent, unfunded or eroded by neoliberal ideas of efficiencies. A case in point is the Centre for Addiction and Mental health (CAMH) program specifically designed to help Black youth which was recently mainstreamed, thereby losing its unique appeal (Jennifer Yang, *Toronto Star*, May 7, 2017). Youth advocates protested, saying it was the only program they trusted to provide culturally relevant services adapted to the needs of minority youth, using an Afrocentric lens that incorporates cultural capital and African relationships and was effective in addressing mental health and addiction issues. Michelle Da Silva, (nowtoronto.com, May 5, 2017) wrote about parents who resisted the system's tendency to generalize that their Black sons were just angry based on the proclivity of their race. Parents had to insist they would not leave the hospital until their sons received treatment, instead of been seen as just another angry Black man. This aptly demonstrates the need for targeted services for people who are often misunderstood as the parents know the child's normal disposition and can tell when something is wrong. They do not assume the child is just acting Black or ignore the reality that the child may be having an episode or something else may be amiss requiring attention.

The Black males in this study were especially frustrated by the patriarchal narrative that suggests it is easy for men to succeed in Canada but fails to recognize how the system actively excludes them by viewing all their actions as violent and constituting them as criminal. They have no Black teachers at school and cannot access Black clinicians who understand their dilemma and can use a culturally relevant model to work with them. Many carry on as though they do enjoy the gains of patriarchy, stigmatizing mental illness, even though they suffer on the inside. When they talk about feelings and mental health, they resort to codes and slangs which may be misinterpreted by non-culturally astute counselors and social workers.

The mainstream's Eurocentric lens creates barriers to effective care and service but even if access to service was perfect, I would caution that emphasizing mental illness of Black youth is fraught with challenges as it does not mean the same thing for them as it does for white youth. It can increase violation of their human rights, denial of education and other basic rights. I take an ideological view that the mental health issues described by the youth in this study for self or siblings appear situational and brought on by the system. Their normal reactions to stressors that uniquely target them are not evidence of mental illness because they have a right to feel pain, grief, hurt, loss, when they are not treated as children who have and value as some in this study felt their lives mattered less to society than pets. The view of Blackness as dis-ability is not their problem but it does cause them mental, emotional, social and physical suffering.

A distinction has to be made between mental illness and the erosion of a people's mental capital induced by the system. Some youth described how no matter what happened when the White girls reported them to teachers and started crying, Black male students might as well start packing up their things, knowing they would be sent to the office regardless of what transpired but this did not happen when Black girls were hurt. The feelings triggered by injustice may find

expression in frustration, stress, anxiety, and anger but may not reflect mental illness and to misinterpret their experiences is to jeopardize the wellbeing of those who do have a mental illness. It can also lead to dismissal of Black youth protests or seeing their resistance as reinforcement of biased beliefs about their mental state. This perpetuates injustice because it enables the system to ignore the mental health of pupils who do not disrupt the class or school. They put up with and are traumatized by enduring unrelenting abuse which may later find expression in adulthood. If mental health discourse serves merely to control Black youth and change their behaviour without corresponding change on the part of the school, then they do not promote mental health and wellbeing of Black youth. Attending to the health of all citizens, preventing illness through upstream approaches is better and cheaper but Black youth who actually need mental health supports deserve to receive humane, culturally relevant treatment that can facilitate equitable outcomes for them that are enjoyed by the rest of society. If the thinking that creates problems for Black youth, male and female is not examined, they remain dehumanized and maligned and bearing the burden of whiteness and hegemonic discourses which disenfranchise them can indeed result in the onset of mental health issues or criminal behaviour.

The White Burden

My research on Black African youth ultimately interrogates whiteness even though I began the research study with a focus on examining the experiences of Black youth. Examining the euphemisms above in the light of literature reviewed in **chapter two** and my findings in **chapter four** definitely highlight whiteness as an issue of concern. Access, attendance and achievement gaps of Black youth, their stories and lived experiences of racism,

marginalization and discrimination implicate whiteness of the staff, curriculum, and policies. As noted in **chapter two**, “the sites from which we oppress or dominate are those sites upon which we least want to cast our gaze” (Dei, 2008, p. 226). Richard Wright uttered the words “there isn’t any negro problem ...there is only a white problem” after World War II in response to questions about American race issues. The youth in my study faced tensions and travails of their own but were also witnesses to the de-skilling and precarious employment of their parents. They had dreams of transcending their parents’ predicaments but were subjected to maltreatment even though many were born in Canada and some had nothing but Canadian education; the problem then is hardly lack of Canadian education. In their meaning-making, some turned their backs on their parents’ culture but aligning with whiteness means believing one has to act, speak, and look white to be accepted. Elevation of whiteness creates an unattainable and undesirable goal rendering assimilation futile, as whiteness unexamined creates the barrier and cannot, therefore, be the solution. White students are taught that Black students have barriers to overcome but they are not taught who or what creates these barriers; they are taught that Blacks need to learn to be Canadian but are not taught who determined that there is but one way to be Canadian. McIntosh (1989) said she was taught that racism is bad and disadvantages others but not how racism benefited her by conferring her with privilege. Aligning with Whiteness cannot address the contradictions Black children face as they transition from the safety of the family to the hostile school system that wrests their cultural foundations, identity, and security away from them. As discussed above in relation to mental health, seeds of self-doubt may take years to manifest but it is to their parents they return, battered and bruised by the white system as their parents navigate the turmoil of raising Black children in the context of anti-Black racism in Waterloo region

(Kumsa et al 2014). It is against this background that I heard and interpreted the words of the young Black women in this study who resolved not to bring Black children into the world.

It is one thing to not desire to have children but to come to the conclusion that Black children may not be worth bringing into the world we live in, calls for an interrogation of what Whiteness is doing in our world and provides a framework for asking questions, not usually asked. For instance, education is regarded as the great equalizer but we must ask - for whom? Who is threatened by Black success or whose interest does the exclusion of Blacks serve? A white system will not be eager to hire Black teachers, broaden the curriculum or enforce anti-Black racism policies, as white supremacy needs Black inferiority. Social mobility of Blacks challenges the hierarchical order and may explain why Afrocentric epistemology or having Black teachers go unimplemented. In **chapter four** youth reported they are not provided counseling, debriefing, or shown empathy when Black youth like them are killed. Denied their humanity, their gathering for mutual support is deemed threatening as power aligns with white privilege, oppressing the youth in their most vulnerable state.

Children are indoctrinated into whiteness from kindergarten and stereotypes become imprinted early. When young impressionable children receive racist messages as benevolent i.e. “for their own good,” they may be unable to discern the masked malfeasance that requires children’s names, food, accent, hair, and identity to be modified for the ease of adults. The experience of participants in this study reveals that growing up Black in Waterloo region is challenging, as interrogating white privilege is seen as ingratitude, over-sensitivity or mal-adaptability. Some whites respond with anger, backlash, denying racism, act to preserve the status quo, denying their personal involvement, thereby ignoring the structures of society or claim they are now the silenced and oppressed. There are others who are able to move past the

personal to understand how society is structured by oppression and privilege and work as allies and accomplices for radical social transformation. Black youth may not deal with seemingly outrageous injustice but the daily struggle to be seen as human and worthy has ramifications. For instance, although the males tend to take sanity breaks from school at a higher rate than the females; Black women may disproportionately experience poverty, gendered violence, and inadequate access to quality healthcare (Heckman, 2004). Their acquiescence to the oppression of whiteness does not detract from the fact that they face double jeopardy (Wane, 2009) by being located at the intersections of race, gender, and class. Heckman, 2004 further asserted that investment in preventing disparities yields returns (crime prevention, skilled, healthy and stable workforce), so attending to the oppression Black youth makes economic sense but entrenched attitudes get in the way.

McMahon (2009), in her study of school administrators, found they were constrained not by policies but by their own internal biases. They had discretionary powers around resource allocation, sanctions, and rewards but attitudes dictated the range of options that authorities were able to explore for racialized students. Their reasons for choosing certain courses of action, assumptions about specific students, and inability to see the problems in the discourse revealed as much about them as it did about the policies because impressionable and vulnerable children trusted teachers and administrators to want and do the best for them.

A Eurocentric lens sees adaptation as conformity to Western norms instead of a two-way exchange, thus reinforcing White supremacy (James, 2011). Consequently, non-conformity is stigmatized without interrogating underlying assumptions and policies that maintain social hierarchies (Sakamoto, 2013; Razack, 2008, Thobani, 2007). Black youth were not oblivious to these hierarchies and Dei et al.'s (1995) study quoted Henry, a participant who said "[I]f you're

going to be anything as a Black person here you have to set up your own. You can't expect to make it in White people's stuff... White people don't like to give Black people nothing" (p. 204). Black youth resistance then is towards whiteness; it is not about disrespect of school authorities or teachers. Their counterparts who are well served by whiteness have no need to resist and can simply focus on their learning and be seen as good students even though they do not even have to worry about representing their race due to their invisible knapsack. In McIntosh, 1989 words, White students can take for granted the availability of teachers, curriculum, policies, and norms that enhance their learning. There are of course Blacks who are lazy, as there are in every race as no race is a homogenous group. Not listening to a person's lived experience is dehumanizing (Sakamoto et al., 2012) and expects "the other" to do all the adapting in order to fit in.

If Whites are doing Blacks a favour in granting them access to privileges that they enjoy and to be White is better than being Black, then Whites cannot then deny their privilege. The expectation that Blacks would be subserviently grateful for access to white privilege or wait until the dominant are ready to concede rights is in itself an admission of privilege as the needs of one group are subordinated to the dictates and convenience of the other. Framed to suggest the other group is impatient, oversensitive or illogical, incremental change is presented as feasible yet Blacks are told society works on merit and at the same time told they must wait for it to kick in. This is why the Afrocentric theory is very relevant to this examination of whiteness. I can say like my white friends that I have many white friends and of course, I do, I live in Canada but this study is not personal, it examines the philosophies and ideologies that support whiteness. It also relies on Afrocentric theory to center African needs, feelings, rights and aspirations. Critical race theory also disavows incremental gains, showing how patronizing, paternalistic views show contempt

for Black Africans, corroborating Frankenberg (1992) view that white people's fear of Blacks is irrational. Disdain for Blacks, often expressed as fear leads schools to take pre-emptive measure to avert imaginary risk by vilifying Black youth and parents while ignoring the ways school breaks down the spirit of children who arrived at school, eager and excited to learn.

Today, some whites think equality is already a reality because of the gains of the civil rights movement, and contend they are the disadvantaged not privileged. Gallagher (2003) said:

The students I interviewed experience their whiteness as a "real" social category that intrudes on most of their everyday activities. Race matters for these students because they have been weaned on a brand of racial politics and media exposure that has made Whiteness visible as a social category while simultaneously transforming whiteness into a social disadvantage (p. 300).

I have argued thus far in this chapter, denial of racism is problematic and success is Eurocentrically defined. It is hardly surprising that whites cling to meritocracy because it is more comfortable to believe in reward for individual choices than to reconcile the history of Whiteness and its structuring of social arrangements in dealings with Indigenous and colonized people through oppressive forces of colonialism and slavery. Moving from "who" to "how" shifts the conversation from individual white persons to a more structural analysis. Everyone has a bias but if a Black person thinks they are superior to Whites, it is no more than a grandiose delusion; they do not hold both the knife and the yam. In other words, they lack the weight of the system to act upon their opinion and cannot institutionalize it. This is different from dominant group opinions upon which structural arrangements are based. Ideas about White superiority exist in relation to power and privilege. They sustain and are reinforced by the systems and vice versa, so they deny unearned privileges but resist change to the existing order because of the benefits. Power and the media answer to them normalizing the oppression of others through euphemisms as seen above. Blacks can hold racist thoughts but have no control over the media, policy-

making apparatus or the systems and structures of society, which are built on the foundation of White supremacy. White people need help to dismantle their defensiveness, guilt or paralysis regarding past atrocities otherwise they resort to victimhood and deny their privilege simply because the truth is uncomfortable. They need space to acknowledge history and form new anti-racist identities. It may be argued that this nurtures white fragility, but only the diseased need a physician. The privileges may not be asked for, but even the most anti-racist White person cannot dis-avow their unearned privilege, so the helpful response is to own and use it for good, by taking the initiative to address racism. “Unfortunately, for many white youth, whose imaginations have been left fallow, unfed by a larger society’s vision or quest for social justice, identity politics engendered a defensive posture” (Giroux (1997, p. 294).

A recognition that the same system might oppress some while privileging others in no way detracts from individual acts of merit or hard work. As white Canadians often have roots in migrant groups, the history of groups who became White (Irish, Jews, Italians and Mexicans) and their categorization, regulation and racial formation is instructive. Alcoff (1998) borrowing from Dubois’s double consciousness theory argues Whites need to jettison ahistorical positioning in encounters with Blacks. It is not just enough to point to individual actions such as friendship with a Black person as proof of tolerance as though being tolerated rather than accepted is what Blacks desire. Allies must expand their imagination to understand that Blacks getting killed without reason is a reality even if it’s not theirs. For what good is goodness and morality that defends not the oppressed but assumes a Black person must have done something to be killed simply because that is the way it would be for Whites?

Teachers refused to get involved in the bullying happening among students especially, urging them to work it out with their “friends” or turning a blind eye because it did not happen

on school property but cyberbullying which also often happens outside school property is taken seriously as rightly it should. Black children may not respond with suicidal ideation but I bear witness to their tears and raw anguish and ask why the response to racial slurs is different from sexual and cyberbullying? Making it a matter between friends denies hierarchical arrangements in the school system and silences Black youth who fear apprehension or incarceration. Truth is necessary for reconciliation but the youth stopped reporting as their truth was not listened to. When it was convenient, authorities told them their peers were their friends and they should work it out, failing which they were labeled, but at other times, they are told they are scary and unlike their peers, reflecting the racial disposition of policymakers (McMahon, 2010).

Kumsa et al. (2015) assert Black parents cannot be naïve or oblivious to white privilege, saying Black mothers and fathers do not sleep until their children come home each night and are able to help them re-member their bruised selves. They feel horror and helplessness their children feel at school but those for whom this has no resonance have privilege that they do not need to interrogate and that is why it is imperative that schools reflect the diversity in the student body to disrupt group-think. My study reported in **chapter four** that staffing is not responsive to demographic shifts. Hart, Lindsay, and Papageorge (2017) also reported that despite increases in student diversity, 90 percent of Washington State's 60,000 teachers are white. The post-migratory ontological narratives of Black Africans show that immigrants to Waterloo want to 'give their children a better life' in Waterloo region but whiteness circumscribes Black lives even though it is invisibilized and unexamined (Bannerji, 1996; Pun, 2009). Western society frames white youth behavior in terms of mental health but criminalizes Black male indiscretions and Caragata (1999) noted that Europeans also come with different culture, language, and beliefs which are accepted but Black people are deemed scary.

Guilt is a negative paralyzing emotion and Black people do not need white guilt which produces avoidance and apathy as you cannot share what you are ashamed of. There is no need to be ashamed of power or privilege; there is only a need to accept the responsibility it dictates. It is the empowered who can share, so the goal is not to dispossess white people, it is the capital one has that one can give whether it is cultural, economic, contextual capital or otherwise. As McIntosh, (1989) noted, some of the privileges that Whites enjoy are positive and should be available to all and that is the task for allies able to acknowledge privilege and get to work doing something about it. If Blacks facing the myriad of issues they have faced through history can share and empower other groups through Black rights and Black feminism movements, producing icons like Dr. King and Nelson Mandela, we all can. I can examine my privilege, education, status, age, etc. and take responsibility for sharing my cultural, political, social, and intellectual capital with the disadvantaged. This will involve a change in basic assumptions that moves these issues beyond abstract ideas and looks inward at our taken for granted habits, discourses, entrenched in the “ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them” (Weedon, 1987, p. 108). Foucault (1977) argued that “power produces knowledge...and Frère suggests knowledge is power”, I argue that power and knowledge influence each other as acting on the knowledge we have is empowering and knowing gives the power to act (p. 27).

As seen above, some schools in Toronto are by their actions acknowledging that the practice of streaming was unjust and the schools are adjusting and adapting in ways that ensure Black youth can succeed. Critical reflection ensures power relations and privilege are

acknowledged and “the other” is validated rather than privileging the good intentions of the dominant as eloquently stated by Dei (2014).

I focus more on the consequences of our educational actions rather than the “good intentions” and “humanism” of pursuing global education. My intellectual and political objective is to ensure that the pursuit of global education helps destabilize existing power relations, colonial hierarchies, and re-centers key questions of equity, power, and social justice in education. An important question for me is: How do we frame an inclusive anti-racist future and what is the nature of the work required to collectively arrive at that future? (p. 5)

Acknowledgment on the part of Whiteness would be humane but it is like asking the masquerade to unmask and dance naked in the public square so we must not depend on it for our healing. In this chapter, we have theorized based on findings from the youth telling their truths, which implicate whiteness and the euphemisms that perpetuate it. Afrocentric ethos will keep Africans wholesome because cultures are kept alive by valuing and adding to them. Documenting our own experiences and insights are important to being grounded and bringing about change. Today, the region of Waterloo and indeed Canada has both a challenge and opportunity. The region is implicated as being having above national rates of hate crimes yet Canada is a nation in the throes of change and diversity is the key. The region can only expect more diversity which includes Black Africans and reciprocal mutual transformation is in the interest of all.

In my concluding **chapters six and seven**, I reflect on my journey as an insider on the outside and an outsider on the inside in the academy and the community and conclude that like the youth schooling out-of- place, I am also researching as an alien. Finally, I discuss the study’s contribution to knowledge and proffer recommendations for further research, policy and practise reforms.

Chapter 6: Reflections of a Sister Researcher: Researching out of Place

The parents of a Black child placed in a split class for the third year were told moving their daughter would mean drawing another child back. Their pleas that she should experience a regular class in her last year in the school were rejected, the school conceded that she is really smart and did not in fact need to be in a split class but proceeded to try to persuade the parents it is still for her good as she gets to help the younger pupils and when pressed further, advanced the argument that it would develop her leadership skills. Stories such as this, from Black African parents with whom I connect socially, culturally, and professionally, fill me with an irresistible urge to do something as multitude of questions beleaguer my soul. If it is so good for this child, why is it so hard to move another child there? Why is it a drawback for any other child, but good for the Black child? Although the common belief is that Black youth are ignored they are not; they are noticed. I delude myself if I think I am going to make them visible, they are already seen, controlled, scrutinized, and oppressed, but, for the wrong reasons. The white gaze rests on their blackness, defining who they are, can be, and what they deserve based on social construction of Blackness. Black youth cannot expect meaningful change because in the words of Audre Lorde, the “master’s tools” confine them to the margins, re-membered only in very specific contexts like the nannies in Frankenberg’s (1992) study.

It is hardly a coincidence that almost half of all students suspended in the last five years in the Greater Toronto Area Are Black (James, 2017). Similarly, in 2016 Waterloo region police services released data showing that Black youth are four times more likely to be stopped, carded and or arrested in the region (Mar 25, 2016 by Jeff Outhit, Waterloo Region Record). I spoke for many other Black parents when I said in a radio interview that the Black community was not surprised as it was what we already knew (Oba 2016, CBC, April 10, 2016). The mainstream

public's surprise shows the disconnect between them and Black populations at the periphery of society.

This reflection is informed by the stories of many Black youth and their families as much as by my family's sojourn as Blacks navigating colonization, education, politicization, and activism. My earthly journey began in Nigeria, a former British colony in West Africa, but shortly after I was born my parents got the "opportunity of a life time" as two of few Nigerians who got to travel to England for education after Nigeria gained independence. My mother left her job as a teacher and in Britain, studied management while my father traded his information officer position with the government for the chance to become a certified accountant. His degree was followed by professional examinations which earned him the British accounting designation whereupon they both returned to Nigeria with the two children they had in those five years. They obtained good jobs in the new Nigeria and my mother's job at the university enabled us to attend the University of Lagos staff school, reserved for faculty and staff. This was in continuation of a tradition with roots in the pre-independence era of special schools for children of expatriates. An elite group, taught by British and Nigerian teachers, instructed in English, we received a very British education and were not permitted to speak our mother tongues. Such was the colonial mentality that even in independence; the master's tools were considered the means to progress. Seeing the good in what is African was not the focus and it was in Britain's interest to forget that the West appropriated African knowledge or had their own forms of social welfare through extended family and kinship family systems (Anucha, 2008; Baffoe, 2014). The partitioning of Africa stymied the continent's unique evolutionary path, ensuring they would continue to be beholden to Britain. Stunted development allowed colonial educators, Nigerian and British, to present "his story" as history teaching us that Prince Henry discovered Africa and Columbus

founded America. It is absurd that being the first European to travel to Africa confers the right to make such claims, but no African would arrogate to themselves, the discovery of Canada for example simply because they happened to come here as settlers.

In Nigerian university, studying sociology and Anthropology up to master's level, I had more latitude with my learning and became fascinated with learning the history and culture of people groups and the effects of urbanization, industrialization, and other ostensible development trends. The books we read were however, mostly written by dead white men (Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Abraham Maslow, and Adam Smith). I loved Margaret Mead, one of the few women cultural anthropological theorists in the 1960s and 1970s and her oft quoted words "*[N]ever doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has*" (attributed to Mead, exact source unknown, brainy quotes, Wikipedia, and interculturalstudies.org). But changing the world for Africans was characterized as moving from underdevelopment to developing by receiving aid from and becoming like the West. The spirited intellectuality we craved was impacted by the premise that Africa is primitive, non-progressive and in need of reformation. Taught to focus on tribal and ethnic dynamics, my parents' tales of racism experienced in the United Kingdom sounded like relics of a time gone by. We were thus blind sighted to the realities for Black people in modern-day Canada when we moved here confidently with our degrees and children.

Canada was an easy choice as a sister commonwealth country known for its humane reputation and continually rated as one of the best places in the world to live (Adam Frisk, March 2017, Global News). Based on the global image of human rights, respect, and equality, we were optimistic, but it was short lived as the reality of racism made itself known and we became aware of human rights violations towards the indigenous owners of the land. In coming

to Canada, we were surreptitiously abetting the colonizers and when it came time to take the citizenship oath, I felt a huge moral tension. Why should I swear allegiance to the queen of England from whom Nigeria secured her independence? Why does one free nation require her citizens to honour another country, especially one that previously colonized Canada? Wrestling with the idea, it dawned on me that it is the colonizers interests, not the colonized that is served by citizenship and immigration process. It was to them we applied, and it is their agenda that is served by the process, the oath, and the multicultural policy. Newcomers are admitted based on ability to fit into the colonizer's empire. Canada is not bound to another but rather to its own European and Anglo-Saxon elements imposed on all by policies and systems that serve the first settlers, not indigenous people in Canada and globally. I could no longer bear to hear immigrants ask why "these Canadians" do not take advantage of all this "land of opportunity" offers. The fact that there is a hierarchy of Canadians is obfuscated by political machinery that pitches newcomers against indigenes who are seen as squandering the privileges of being Canadian. I realized it is easy to blame the oppressed when the disparity and inequity in the system is hidden and the admission process strategically co-opts new settlers into ahistorical discourses that ignore colonization, slavery, residential schools, and imperialism of Europe.

I mistakenly assumed that our shared heritage as Commonwealth nations makes Nigeria and Canada kindred nations, but it is a tale of two Canada's; the colonized with whom we share the same history and the colonizers on the opposite end of the spectrum. It is not part of their repertoire that Africans speak English or that Africans are equal. Former colonizers and the colonized do not simply become the same because they are now settlers in Canada, no matter the efforts to mask Canada's historic and current role as a colonizer. Finding ourselves obligated to the colonizers as global indigenous people has the potential to distance us from the natives and

inhibits our agency. In accepting the oppression Canada metes out to our formerly colonized bodies we consent to the oppression of indigenous Canadians. We accept the devaluation of our education, take survival jobs, and have our dignity stripped but still compete to be model immigrants, because to do otherwise is to reinforce stereotypical pathologies.

If I do not contest the right of the regime to define any oppressed or colonized person's life, I cannot be part of the right-thinking people who change the world a la Margaret Mead., because to do so requires recognition that things are warped. We can only amend what we acknowledge is wrong. The Eurocentric imperialist mind sees pathology when it sees a Black person and we met Canadians who were convinced of our inferiority and deficits ere they met us. As implausible as it was, people were more willing to accept that we learned to speak English at genius speed than to concede that we arrived from Africa with knowledge or skills. Erroneous view that speaking English is inherently Canadian de-historicizes my Nigerian experience, negates the lived realities of First Nations people, and erases the French completely. Believing that anything of worth or value could not have come from elsewhere, must have been acquired in Canada but only from certain Canadians and anything else is blemished was comforting to the White Canadians we encountered we met. It enabled the elevation of negative social construction of blackness to truism and we had to make meaning of this as newcomer settlers to Canada. My Sociology background and work experience in Nigeria made social work a natural fit for me in my new home and was the avenue I chose to pursue to get back into the labor market. I applied to the social work master's program at Wilfrid Laurier University within months of being in the country and was only few months into the program when the school reported my family to the child welfare authorities as described in the introduction to this dissertation. Naturally, I worried about how this would affect my chances of becoming a social worker but thankfully the

agency saw through the racial prejudice and deemed the report lacking in merit. This experience reminded me of my first job in this country, managing a youth access program for expelled students under the zero-tolerance era of the early 2000s. I saw an over- representation of youth who were racialized, indigenous or living with disabilities in the program and our experiences further reinforced my growing impression that this was symptomatic of hegemonic intolerance.

Becoming Politicized

These experiences opened my eyes to ways in which Canadian society is structured by race. In Nigeria, education provided a source of livelihood and brought with it status and privilege but in my new country, my education meant nothing. I was lucky to be admitted to a master's program as many others had to start afresh as undergraduates, incurring student loans and increasing the distance between them and their dreams of re-asserting their pre-immigration professional identity. Many settled for survival jobs as cab drivers, personal support and factory workers, suffering grave social justice and mental health toll. Surprisingly, immigrants were not getting the empathy they deserved but were blamed by the general society. When the media blamed immigrants for Waterloo region's poor results in the grade six and ten literacy test results, I wrote an opinion editorial in the local newspaper (Oba, 2006, Oct 23, The Record Newspaper). In it, I pointed out that communities with more diversity such as Toronto and Peel did not record dismal results. I argued therefore that poor results cannot be attributed to the presence of immigrants; instead the region should learn from other school boards and rethink how it serves the immigrants it continues to attract.

It soon dawned on me that I was no longer praying "let it not be another Black boy, lord", or getting angry at Black youth for giving all Blacks a bad name. I had gone from being embarrassed by negative media reports about Black youth to feeling scandalized by the height of

negative social construction. My colonized mind once desperate to prove we can be model immigrants had ignored the fact that the media emphasized race when a Black youth was alleged to have offended but often silent on the race of non- Blacks. To my own chagrin, I realized I had not noticed how the media relished equating criminality with blackness and fragmented visible minorities into deserving and undeserving. I had been almost blind sighted by hegemonic evocation of negative public emotions against Black youth to justify their maltreatment. The longer I lived in Canada, the more, I understood that although it is reputed to be safe and ideal for raising children, I could ill afford naïveté in assuming the same rules apply to all, “*because I am a Black woman, the mother of a Black boy.... I cannot afford to forget; because he’s dead if I forget* (Kumsa et.al, 2014, P. 23). Multiculturalism is clearly not equivalent to justice and equity, some Canadians are more equal than others and I could not help being launched into connecting the personal and the political as I observed, witnessed, heard of, or experienced systemic injustice that need to be right-ed.

In deciding to pursue a job in the child welfare sector upon my graduation, I chose to make a statement to affirm the professionalism of the worker who investigated and dismissed the spurious referral against my family. I also wanted to be an ally to vulnerable families navigating the child protection system. Above all, it was my opportunity to test the veracity of the agency’s assurances that my eligibility to work there was not compromised by the racially biased report. True to its word, the agency offered me first a placement and then a permanent job, working in varied roles in different capacities over a ten-year period. I also had the rare record of having none of my families go to trial as all my cases were resolved through family reunification, strengthening families through ongoing support and collaborative permanency planning. With other likeminded workers, I initiated and co-facilitated a cultural sensitivity project to promote

anti-oppressive practice among all agency staff. The worker assigned to my family never knew I would someday be her colleague, but her critical thinking and self-reflective lens enabled her to disrupt hegemonic narratives as a White person. I personally wanted to make a difference with marginalized families who would otherwise be re-traumatized by the system, but also desired that anyone working with vulnerable families would be equipped to investigate, assess, and serve families with respect, cultural sensitivity, and awareness of their own privilege.

I also brokered meetings between the agency and the African women association of Waterloo region to demystify child welfare and enhance foster parent recruitment, through cultural understanding and inter-group collaboration. In time, however, I concluded that social work as practiced in the field was reactionary, waiting for referrals, most of which came from schools and served to traumatize families. I had a choice to continue to help families cope with oppression or engage in an upstream approach. Social workers have potential to impact families positively prior to their getting involved with child protective services through preventive interventions. They can also be change catalysts in the school system through critical thinking and using an anti-oppressive lens to influence others in interdisciplinary settings. My experiences with my own children at school, the stories of other Black parents and work experiences were illuminating the school system's role as a site of oppression. It was important to not normalize injustice, but rather hold the school system accountable as a human service organization. Positive responses to training and presentations I conducted convinced me I could make an even greater impact in the classroom, equipping future social workers to effectively engage diversity in Canada's changing social milieu not trying to remold them in the field. Thus, I returned to school for doctoral studies and embraced my call to be a teacher. Teaching chose me early in life because as the first of five children, I was always simplifying instructions for my siblings and

bridging the gap between generations. As a teacher, I fully emplace myself in the classroom, as a racialized woman, researcher, social worker, and human being. By so doing I challenge my students to do the same, communicating issues of diversity with creativity, gentleness, and tenacity, modeling self-reflexivity which I consider vital to educating worthwhile social workers.

On the inside, as an outsider

My insider emic connections enhanced my credibility in the community, but Kuwee Kumsa, cited in Baines, Eds., (2007), discovered, “we” versus “them” divides can plague groups that appear cohesive. An essentialist view of Blacks would assume sameness of experiences, but I could not ignore the power differentials at play in our encounters. Because I am a doctoral student some youth felt that the research was only for those who were university bound. I belong to the Black African community but as an educator, teaching at the university, it was possible that I could be another agent of oppression from the ivory towers. Similarly, when I began my child protection job, some had seen it as crossing over to the dark side and betraying my own to work with an agency that “takes children from families”. My ability to operate as an outsider on the inside enabled me to organize inter-group dialogues between the agency and African women, thus helping to dispel some of the mistrust on both sides. Regarding the dissertation study, my role as an after-school homework tutor in the community could also give the impression that my focus was on school success and achievement, rather than empathy for what Black youth face at school. This made it harder to recruit those who had exited the system or were struggling and or having a hard time in the school system. Internalized oppression can breed self-doubt about one’s worth as the media; schools and society continue to portray Black youth as lazy, dumb, and deviant as noted in chapter two. The fibers of community are textured, uneven, subjective, and undefined. My roles and perspectives remain very fluid, insider is not a static category, I am not

only an insider in the African or Black community, I am also an insider in the academia but often an outsider in both.

In the academy, I was an insider based on my qualifications but my body, my research topic and my worldviews set me apart as an outsider. Exchanging pleasantries and talking about research interests often became awkward upon the mention of my plans to examine experiences of alienation among Black African youth at school. I reflected on some of my experiences of meeting with awkward silence, shifting bodies, assumptions, and avoidance tactics of all genres in an article about my attempts to mainstream Afrocentric epistemology (Oba, 2016). It is not only the youth who know alienation intimately, in what is meant to be the citadel of liberal critical learning, cross fertilization of ideas and knowledge exchange, the white gaze whittled away at all knowledge but its own, leaving me with a distinct feeling that I was expected to leave a part of me outside the classroom. Universities point to increasing diversity in student enrolment, but the adjustments and change needed to effectively engage them are ignored. Difference was not really allowed to make a difference. Like my young participants in school, I was on the inside but ontologically marked as an outsider for not acquiescing to established narratives.

On the other hand, being an outsider was invariably easier than rejecting interest in my research which encouraged me to frame it as a study of the success factors of high achieving Black youth. I believed such a study would reinforce hegemony and allow the system to ignore their own need for change by putting the onus on Black youth to conform to the success factors. The high achieving Black youth whom I call “vulnerable successes” in this dissertation would be used to justify continued inattention to the marginalization of Black youth. Instead, I conducted a study that listened to Black African youth who told me that they have not been taught by Black

teachers, are not exposed to African curriculum or Black history, and are abused daily. This study highlights a need for schools and the host community to become welcoming and accepting of Black youth and other vulnerable people. By asking questions not yet asked and using the critical Afrocentric model I developed, I accessed repressed stories of insidious daily trauma. I did not succumb to the “benevolence” of those who know nothing of the Black experience, but it was not easy to reject overtures to my outsider self without seeming ungrateful.

The constant tug and pull of being the outsider on the inside was not only at school but also in the community where I encountered Black parents who wanted their children to take part in the study to get help. I had to differentiate my researcher role from my advocacy roles within the African association. It was important to separate these roles to ensure the research was not misconstrued. If the youth felt I was just another adult aligning with their parents or other authority figures, I would be unable to access the deep insights of the youth. If they also saw me as a typical researcher oblivious to their pain who merely seeks to appropriate their knowledge they would only tell me what the system wants to hear. It was a constant inside-outside dance and it felt easier to deal with being rejected as a rebel by the institution than to bear the perplexed looks and hurt feelings when their “gracious” show of interest was unrequited. Hearing the anguished cry of parents for help for their children was also more difficult than to be seen as a traitor by my community and so was seeing young participants sob while recounting the racial slurs, name calling, grief and pain they experienced. I had learned as a facilitator of men’s groups to be comfortable with men crying or showing emotion, but this was even harder as these were vulnerable young people who could very well have been my children. Still, I had to resist the urge to rush to comfort them but had to allow them to access their repressed emotions.

My experiences in the academy provided insights into what the youth face when they are labeled angry or hostile when they resist the lack of inclusion in the school system. Afrocentric framework enabled me to center their experiences and I humanized myself and the research by using food, music, elders, cultural ambience, and participatory strategies to equalize power and promote cultural resonance. I was careful not to raise false hopes for help-seeking parents but provided referrals and resources when needed. As the issues are systemic and not individual, the study held promise of communal benefit, but I could not promise direct individual rewards.

I stepped back from the research, interrogating my own growth and saw that it was transforming me as much as I hoped it would, the community. In the end, the decision of the youth to keep on meeting for peer support and their outreach to those who ordinarily would not have participated in the research was gratifying. I could not assume the role of the liberator, it was mutual liberation (Paulo Freire, 2003), as we collectively experienced growth and I gained better understanding of both intersecting oppressions and power or influence. Kumsa (2011) in Baines, (2011) Eds. stated “*we need both the intimate knowledge of the insider and distant knowledge of the outsider to fully engage in transformative disruptions... commonality is not the sole basis for understanding, we can gain insights from our differences, too*” (P. 121). The youth presented on this research at the school board and I presented at two conferences and was interviewed twice on radio about this study. This communicated to the youth that they are involved in something of significance. The participatory nature of the research enabled voice, agency, and movement from victimhood to change agent, not making them visible but changing how they are seen. Non-conformity can be tough and isolating but the reality that these youths have not been taught by any Black teacher is already resonating with mixed audiences. A famous quote states, “*The world in which you were born is just one model of reality. Other*

cultures are not failed attempts at being you; they are unique manifestations of the human spirit” (Davis, 2003). Disseminating these findings about Black African youth in Waterloo region will hopefully evoke positive responses to calls for action and recommendations in the next chapter.

As Benjamin in Baines (2007) noted “the individuals who engage in such a challenge often find themselves drawn into more challenges as they encounter overlapping layers of repression and injustice” (P.196). In response to the youth stories, I sought for ways to communicate what I was hearing, and found myself drawn deeper into social action. I created the Community Academic Reciprocal Engagement (CARE) social innovation laboratory, bringing together social work students and middle school age Black girls for intergroup dialogue using art. It is not part of my thesis but gave me a vehicle to overcome paralysis and return to my dissertation with renewed resolve. The tensions, notwithstanding, the benefits of my emic connections to the issues make this dissertation study a meaningful contribution to social justice.

I heard my parents’ stories of discrimination in England but also become a witness to its persistence and pervasiveness many decades later based on the voices of youth in this study who represented countless others who have and continue to endure racial trauma. It is no wonder that the United Nations considered it befitting to highlight the plight and potentials of African people during this decade. My journey led to becoming a change catalyst but challenging racism places me on the outside of our post racial academies. Nonetheless, it is unacceptable for Canada to be one of the best places to live in the world for some, but not for all. These “ten years to act” for Africans must be used to push the envelope to honour Africans in Canada with all other citizens and heirs. The Black sister, brother, child, parent, researcher, must be fully present-ed, body, soul, and spirit on the inside and redefining the inside by broadening it and living fully, as people re-membered in a truly inclusive Canada.

Chapter 7: Insights, Implications, Contributions, Recommendations,

This Decade, [for people of African descent] for which the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was designated as the lead agency, aims to strengthen actions and measures to ensure the full realization of the economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights of people of African descent, and their full and equal participation in society. Under the theme "Recognition, Justice and Development", the Decade [2015-2024] provides an operational framework to encourage States to eradicate social injustices inherited from history and to fight against racism, prejudice and racial discrimination to which people of African descent are still subjected.

Introduction

The period 2015 to 2024 was designated the international decade for people of African descent in December 2014. I had just fulfilled my candidacy requirements and was excited about writing my dissertation at such an opportune time. In this chapter, I reflect on insights from the dissertation study and sadly one of them is the lack of recognition of this important decade in Canada. In addition to sharing lessons earned from the youth in this study, I discuss the study's contributions to the social work profession and proffer recommendations for policy and practice reforms in the schools and in conclusion, I look into the future by highlighting the limitations of this study and the opportunities for future large-scale research during this epoch making decade to better understand the experiences of Black Africans in Canada and the impacts on their health and wellbeing, education and employment as well as quality of life as Canadians.

hooks (2003) admonishes teachers and administrators to stop avoiding race issues and "move past their denial of the existence of racism", (p. 26). This decade would be a perfect time to engage Africans but those implicated in the systemic oppression of Black African youth seem to have blind spots regarding their role. Structural causes of low graduation rates and reasons why the youth seek to escape from school are ignored. The fish does not see the water in which it

swims but given the code of ethics under which social workers practice and the mandate to promote the well-being of all, the profession has a unique role to play in the school system to ensure no further harm is done to any youth. This explains why this research about schooling experiences of Black African youth is relevant to social work. Having said that, I do recognize that lofty code of ethics does not mean social workers are immune to white privilege or any more cognizant of their role as agents of oppression. I agree with Lindo (2011) that “without the ability and opportunity to reflect upon how race operates in contemporary society, no changes to definitions, theories about race, and importantly, praxis, will make a difference” (p.162). As an interdisciplinary research, this study highlights the need for social workers, teachers, parents, policymakers, and the larger society to be self-aware and reflective in order to decode what is happening to all racialized youth in the schools. Social workers were culpable in the sixties scoop for which Canada is just making restitution gestures. Political pundits, experts, and indigenous people still ponder how the noble profession of social work participated in such reprehensible acts.

Social workers are not alone, residential schools had teachers, demonstrating their complicity with the system. In many formerly colonized nations, colonized pedagogy and curriculum continue to be the order of the day (Shizha, 2007) even though those countries are “independent”. Social workers, teachers, even Black parents are affected by hegemonic discourses and life challenges in a fast-changing society. Michael Adams’ optimistic work, *Unlikely Utopia: The Surprising Triumph of Canadian Pluralism* (2009) describes Canada as “a country of peace and prosperity with laws that are just, with people who are humane, and where citizens of all backgrounds enjoy equal opportunities” (p. 149). His words reflect a huge disconnect with reality as the hierarchy in Canadian society makes it neither just nor equitable.

As recently as 2016, racially motivated hate crimes and rate of carding of Black youth heightened to several times the average for non-Blacks in Waterloo region (CBC, 2016). Findings from the Black experience project in Toronto show concerns about racism and discrimination as more than half of all students suspended in the GTA were Black (Angie Seth, Global News, August 5, 2017). This is not coincidental and even if it was, it would not be tolerated for White youth. Similarly, there would be a huge outcry if the missing and murdered Canadian women were White and not Indigenous. We are certainly not in a post-racial utopia and it is this conversation that this dissertation research joins using Afrocentric and critical race theories to center the Black experience and dismantle hegemonic myths and assumptions that thrive on foundations of assumed universality of Eurocentrism. The school is the setting of this study, but its purpose is not to vilify teachers, rather the research underscores the importance of education and the role of teachers. School attendance is mandatory for all children but achieving the purpose is hindered by systemic issues that harm Black children albeit unintentionally and needs to be addressed to ensure efforts, expenses and energy are harnessed meaningfully.

Contributions of the Study

There is a dearth of scholarship on the experiences of Black African youth in small Canadian cities. This Afrocentric study contributes to the body of knowledge on Black African youth in Waterloo Region by recognizing that injustice thrives when the structural context is unexamined and perpetrates injustice resulting in pervasive racism in a Canada where no one is racist. Canadians conceptualize racism as overt acts, rather than subtle manifestations of hostility that are commonly directed at racialized people in this society. This problematic view of racism is widely asserted in Canada where covert subtle racism is more common, thereby enabling erasure of all but the most brutal and physical types of racism. This dismissal requires those

targeted to name it, address it and change it. Racism is not always overt; it can be covert, subtle, and insidious. This study found that alienation defined as “to turn away, to estrange and the state of being an outsider or the feeling of being isolated” (Collins English Dictionary, 2016) is prevalent. However, the hostility that falls within acceptable Eurocentric norms are passed off as accidental and are not recognized by staff and teachers. Policies that require the oppressed to adduce evidence of racism re-traumatize the vulnerable. This study emphasizes the need for those who work with children to recognize, prevent, and address racism of any nature.

The study highlights the need for a framework to operationalize anti-Black racism in the school system as the lack of knowledge of what to do is at the root of most of the denial of racism’s existence. In this regards training and public education would go a long way in ensuring that this is no longer a taboo topic but openly discussed and addressed and therefore does not protect perpetrators over the victimized. The youth in this study reported that their schools have diversity policy but did not implement it, leading the students to conclude “*what is the point*” and stop reporting acts of racism which enable schools to continue with their fancy slogans about diversity and be complacent in their denial. In the meantime, Black youth continue to suffer trauma that is visceral, embodied and painful. The fear that race work can be a divisive long process means education continues to be built on foundations of injustice but there must be recognition that this is not without effects and sufferers.

Black cultural perspective on education (as a collective and moral vehicle) is radically different from the Eurocentric view of education as objective, neutral, and speculative (Tilliotson & McDougal, 2013). Re-conceptualizing education by reforming school systems can counter negativity and untruths about the African continent (Dei, 2011) and fulfill the noble mandate of promoting liberation for groups left out by current structures. Education is a moral imperative;

Canada's growth is dependent on immigration from non-European countries, therefore the public must be informed and understand that engagement and productivity of all people are important for social cohesion. Emphasizing immigration but not the immigrant or their integration means that "significant new investment in education is not reaching many of the children who need them most because long-identified barriers to learning are not being addressed" (McMurtry & Curling, 2008, p. 3). Afrocentrism emphasizes the moral and social justice imperative of education for Africans by centering their needs as human beings. This is why we need an education justice movement that recognizes that Black Africans of all genders have mental health needs (Mfoafo-M'Carthy, 2010). We must promote access to education regardless of gender, postal code, or colour. This study broadens our understanding of Black youth experiences, showing they suffer an opportunity gap because of exclusive practices as "*inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone*" (Dei, 2006)

Implications : *Social Work with Africans*

This study has methodological, policy, and community implications for social work. As previously noted, Black youth in this study reported mental, emotional and physical health concerns and social workers have a moral obligation with regard to vulnerable children so this is within the social work responsibility. To take on this role, social workers have to metamorphose, and be able to acknowledge their hubristic assumptions because the thinking that erodes Black youth mental capital cannot help them; it can only harm them further. As most social workers like teachers in Canada are White, the allure of a post-factual era must be resisted as it blurs the line between illusion and reality and increases susceptibility to myths that defend supposed

innocence (Ahmed, 2009). The words below, though written to colonized people by Alfred (2005) can instruct social workers who want to practice anti-oppressively in Canada's changing social milieu because, in this era, the vulnerable need clear-eyed critical thinking practitioners

Decolonization... is a process of discovering the truth in a world created out of lies. It is thinking through what we think we know to what is actually true. ... [The truth is the main struggle, and the struggle is manifest mainly inside our heads. From there, it goes to our families and our communities and reverberates outward into the larger society, beginning to shape our relationship with it.... our struggle is with all existing forms of political power. (Alfred, 2005, p. 280)

Social workers must embrace a worldcentric worldview which involves double consciousness (Dubois, 1935) that recognizes that their worldview is neither universal nor objective. There is scant scholarship on Afrocentric social work and the profession is just being developed in Africa (Anucha, 2008). However, Africa had its extended family, kinship systems as well as mediation and alternative conflict resolution mechanisms which were eroded by colonial impositions. These African values align with anti-oppressive social work, therefore applying the social work strategy of joining to working with Africans is not new or mystical but a humanizing connection to broaden the application of what is already encoded within social work values and principles. Sinclair (2010) sheds light on cultural ways of bridging social's work oppressive past with current realities to inform future directions. Imposition of Eurocentric ideas upon Africans suggests a superiority perspective and the belief that one's race is superior to another is the definition of racism and it only serves to perpetuates oppression (Mullaly, 2010). Good practitioners deal with personal challenges in their life before embarking upon a quest to help clients confront theirs, as embedded in each social worker's practice, are realities, values, and context. Making meaning of the world without addressing latent transference issues is not innocence or objectivity; it is as Dr. King Junior noted, refusal to lift oppressive burdens.

The dispossessed of this nation... live in a cruelly unjust society. They must organize a revolution against that injustice, not against the lives of persons who are their fellow citizens but against the structures through which society is *refusing to take means which have been called for, and which are at hand to lift the load of poverty* – Martin Luther King Jr. (emphasis mine)

Social workers can be agents of change who promote justice in their practice setting or custodians of the repressive order. Colluding with oppressive structures is not neutrality, it is oppression because Black youth should not face racism, suspensions, or hatred camouflaged as fear (Frankenberg, 1992) alone. Good social work is a complex relational balancing process that involves power and cultural dynamics. This is why even racialized social workers need thick descriptions, getting around, under and inside the stories they hear, to identify unexamined racism as illusions about being in a post-race era can also influence racialized people.

Contrived ignorance or complacency is contrary to the social work code of ethics, the Canadian charter of rights and freedoms or the United Nations human rights codes. (McIntosh, 1989) urged women to use their experiences of gender oppression as a springboard to taking a role in ending other forms of oppression. Social work values include respect for the Inherent Dignity and Worth of Persons, Pursuit of Social Justice, and service to Humanity. What Black youth demand is neither charity nor favours but inalienable rights as humans. While there is a need for policy reforms such as hiring Black teachers and incorporating Black history and curriculum, social work practice can be the change in interdisciplinary settings of practice. Social workers can influence systems through anti-oppressive practice by aiming to reduce disparate impact, not just unequal treatment. Social work role in schools cannot be underestimated as the skills that make good social workers who can advocate for and engage marginalized students

Social workers cannot ignore children facing trauma, doing so makes the profession complicit rather than accomplices with Black youth needing redress. This goes beyond merely acknowledging privilege or being an ally, accomplices get into the trenches, not just as supporters of the movement but as part of the movement who take action to transform systems. Working with Africans, therefore, requires a radical paradigm shift as the erasure of the African experience, not the setting, system, policies or codes of ethics is what impedes good social work practice at every stage of the life cycle. In the spirit of the decade for people of African origin, based on the findings of this dissertation, I offer strategies for social workers to engage African youth. They are not about helping Black youth, cope with, adapt or fit into oppression, but rather rethinking social construction of Africa and promoting radical social transformation.

Humanize Blacks - Although social workers promote the well-being of all people, Blacks are not seen as fully human (Frankenberg, 1992) unwittingly justifying historical acts of slavery, apartheid, and Jim Crowe as well as ongoing racism. Society discounts the humanity of Black children by suggesting they can wait as though they do not have the needs and rights of other children and the youth in this study reported they felt their lives did not matter, pets were valued more than them and only the needs of their White counterparts were recognized. Reductionist views of Blacks as brutes which were evident in the youth being demonized as scary tend to deny their mental capacities. Programs and services can only be effective if there is a paradigm shift, seeing Black youth as human, not criminals in waiting or mutinous students to be feared. They are human, have feelings which can be hurt and they can experience mental health issues (Mfoafo-M'Carthy, 2010) when they are ignored, bullied, and punished unjustly. A lens that recognizes their hopes, potentials, dreams, pride, dignity, and aspirations (James, 2014) can facilitate humane assessments, intervention, documentation and better collaboration with the

youth and their parents. Reynolds's words spoken in 1942 about students remain pertinent, [W]e do not find presenting themselves for learning ... detached intellects or even detached personalities. We find biological organisms which must survive ... social beings who want an honorable place in society for themselves (p. 68).

Pay Attention - Social workers learn about the use of self but we all have blind spots so we must deliberately pay attention to the things, issues, people, groups, locations that impede the ability to practice reflectively. Triggers carry a message; they represent intersections of reality with myths that are entrenched. Personal hang up or misgivings about Blacks must be acknowledged and worked through, not denied. Being attuned to triggers can promote the self-discovery that creates transformation in one's self while unexamined prejudice and inability to understand one's role as a cultural actor puts the vulnerable at risk. The self-preservation that prioritizes White middle-class privileged cocoons of personal comfort must be recognized because Black youth requires cultural sensitivity. Social workers must recognize where they are on the continuum and support the work of those who are further along in being able to work effectively from a culturally sensitive space while they remain open to learning and becoming adept at it too. There may also be a need to recognize that not all social workers can work with Black youth, some women prefer to see female counselors to avoid transference issues and it should be acceptable for Black youth to work with Black clinicians whom they can trust who will not apply a Eurocentric lens, who might understand their need to have parent involvement and who can decode their slangs and codes without misinterpreting them. These are real issues not to be taken personally by white or Black social workers who still have their work to do to gain the trust of Black youth.

Respect cultural capital - The portrayals of racialized people as victims only reflect the danger of a single story about any individual or group. Everyone has strengths and foibles and indigenous cultures across the globe have strengths, knowledge, ideologies, philosophies, and systems which have served them well for centuries. People may access repressed knowledge with guidance from trained professionals, but healing and solutions to a person's problems lie deep within them, not from the helper. Social workers must, therefore, respect what Africans have tried and has worked for them even if such truths have been subsumed by fear of stigmatization. The youth in this study felt empowered and had a better sense of belonging when they were able to bring a parent in to tell an African story, use Wole Soyinka's book for a presentation or attend Nelson Mandela's memorial event. Pre-colonial Africa's voluntary mechanisms such as extended family and kinship systems, age grades, and clans met the material, emotional and social needs of members. Long before the advent of the colonialists, they harnessed resources for the common good for the wellbeing of the young, poor, and elderly. Colonialism, urbanization, and industrialization fragmented families as the homestead and workplace became separate and younger generations moved to the cities. Still, Anucha (2008) found that Nigerians continue to fulfill communal, ethnic and familial obligations in a spirit of reciprocity. It is noteworthy that in this study, youth found hope and inspiration in parents, extended family, and faith or ethnic community. Despite the fact that some of these children have never lived outside Canada, these enduring systems helped them navigate the world. Social workers must, therefore, respect the wisdom of the culture. It is reflected in proverbs and pithy sayings and they can counter oppressive value judgments and promote positive collaborative engagement.

Make Helping Meaningful - Working with clients requires seeing them as assets, not disruptions or risks. Social work obsession not only with risk but the fear and risk of risk limits ability to engage certain clients as the *raison d'être* of our practice. It is reactive and a waste of training for school social workers to focus on attendance monitoring or suspension and expulsion hearings. Proactive, preventive relationship building work meets students where they are and is more meaningful. Black or African is not a homogenous identity; All Black males are not criminals, there are criminals in every sociological grouping. Generalizations and dichotomies become meaningless when the person is known and not objectified. A child can be both poor and happy, be Black and belong to an upstanding family. They do not all need apprehension and a good life is not synonymous with being in a White family neither is a Black family inherently risky. All encounters with Blacks cannot be about risk, Blacks had more to fear from Whites from terrorist acts of slavery and colonialism and still do today as recent events such as those in the United States demonstrate. The flipping of the script to label Blacks dangerous is therefore unjustifiable. Progress for Blacks is not about becoming western, there are good things to be taken from Africa and the West but it is not that the West is or has always been pristine, pure, peaceful, and good and Black is bad. Freeman, (2016) contrasts Western individual personal agency with indigenous agency. While agency in western thought is associated with speaking up, in more collective communities, it is about helping kith and kin. In African ethos, it is about getting there together, not getting there fast, it is not about the hero rescuer but collective barn-raising. Therefore, Black youth agency includes advocating for peers who have disabilities, leaving school to work, to support family or to avoid disgracing parents or to protect the brotherhood and or support one's sisters. These noble motivations must be studied, harnessed and used to anchor Black youth engagement

Re-imagine Social Work Training - Social workers need robust knowledge sets and tool boxes but using varied tools that are totally Eurocentric is inadequate in Canada's rapidly evolving society. Social work training lags behind demographic shifts and schools of social work are implicated in subjugating marginalized members of society through unintended consequences of professional helping or inaction. Social work schools must take this responsibility seriously (Watters, Cait and Oba 2016)

The helping relationship, which is affected by the characteristics of the social worker is a key factor in client outcomes. As such, professional suitability relates to social workers' ability to establish successful helping relationships. This highlights the importance of assessing students for their professional suitability, and consequently, the gatekeeping role of schools of social work (P.33)

If immigrants and refugees arriving in Canada regardless of educational level intentionally learn to navigate a new culture, language, and laws, then social workers can learn if they consider it important. I agree with Freeman (2016) that social work practice and education must develop broader strategies to client engagement. Assessing personal suitability, prioritizing field placement, ensuring diversity and anti-oppressive content are infused throughout the curriculum which should be reviewed regularly in consultation with service users are important roles of social work schools (Watters, Cait, and Oba, 2016)

Join with Africans - The principle of "meeting our clients where they are" is fundamental to social work practice. Reynolds (1942) notes the incongruence of working with people without trusting relationship. "We wonder how anyone could ever have expected to do educational work without knowing those who were to be educated" (Reynolds, 1942, p. 202). Reynolds characterization of students also captures the needs of Black African youth to be seen and known. Freeman (2015) surmised that indigenous social work is not about cultural competency which is often turned into cultural and racial profiling, citing Gray (2013) who asserted that

indigenous social work is about community connections and perspectives. Watters, Cait, and Oba, 2016, found that service users do not care how much a worker knows until they know how much the worker cares. They resented workers who think they know, judged and tried to fix them before meeting them.

My foray into establishing a social innovation laboratory created an avenue for experiential learning that would take social work students out of their comfort zone to demystify Blackness. Their responses included tears, anger, guilt, anxiety, self-doubt but they also nominated me for a teaching award citing the six months' experiment as the highlight of their master's program. African epistemology can be incorporated into schools of social work but social work students should be required to undergo urban diversity experiences that shake their worldviews, trigger emotions and produce the best reciprocal learning relationships. Social workers who can understand and prevent trauma Black youth face can avert mental health issues and make them feel accepted and able to learn without anxiety. Any investment to make that happen is great because "[Education is the most important determinant yet discovered of how far one will go in today's world]" (Collins, 1979, p. 3). Waterloo region schools' stratified system is contributing to disparate outcomes for Black youth and in a world where race continues to present different returns on education between Blacks and whites, social workers must create an enabling environment for social equity in all practice settings

Act in the Best Interest of Africans - Social workers pursue the best interest of all clients, so if the profession begins to see Blacks as human, it would recognize they have interests and act to ensure the best outcomes for them. This will require recognizing that "we live in a society characterized by difference but that differences are not always regarded positively, "differences are used to exclude rather than include" (Mullaly, 2010, p. 6). This calls for wholistic services,

seeing the client as a whole person and recognizing power differentials that obscure the interests of the other. Scrutiny, control, suspension, and discipline may be impersonal to a worker who objectifies the Black youth but not to the youth who is preyed upon by invisible structures of oppression. Perceptions of social workers as merely serving the bidding of school authorities need to be addressed through caseload reductions that enable social workers to actually develop relationships with students at one school rather than attending to crisis from one school to the other. Denial inhibits worker ability to help racialized learners see that their travails are not of their making. The acquiescence of female students in the face of racial bullying and harassment, which puts them at risk as well as the equation of Black masculinity with criminality, must be recognized in interpreting referrals and striking relationships with youth.

In summary, this study showed that working with racialized youth requires significant internal work as a social worker or school system. It demands to eschew superiority, prioritizing their best interest, and respecting their wisdom but starts with conceding that Blacks are human, have rights, and deserve the same outcomes as others. Social workers must do more than acknowledge their privilege; they must go beyond being allies and become active change catalysts or accomplices rather than custodians of the social order.

Methodological and Theoretical Implications

This study sought to answer the question: What is the nature of alienation experienced by Black African Youth in Waterloo Region. It aligns closely with the UN decade for people of African descent themes of *"Recognition, Justice, and Development"*. Spivak (1988) asked "can the Subaltern speak?" referring to the voicelessness felt by third world women. Similarly, this study asks, can Black youth speak, be heard and validated.

Strengths of the Research Design

Dismantling binaries: Positive Youth Engagement and Elder involvement

Focus group and interview methods were modified by involving elders as facilitators of a youth dialogue forum and adopting a storytelling approach in keeping with African orality and regard for elders. As noted in **Chapter three**, elders' limited experience of Canadian schooling made the youth the experts but learning was mutual as the youth also understood concerns for social mobility and empathy for their trauma are not mutually exclusive. Intergenerational dynamics did not encumber the quality of the research but challenged dichotomies between elders and youth, race-focus versus grit, objectivity over subjectivity or ethnicity as diametrically opposed to being Canadian. Participating in the research study motivated the youth to pursue social activism galvanized by the support of the elders who communicated a sense of their worth. The African proverb, "the hand of the child cannot reach the shelf but the elders' cannot enter the gourd is very apposite as distancing children from elders' compromises security and identity of African youth. This study shows that both groups need each other's insights to navigate Western systems effectively because parents also experience discrimination through non-valuation of their credentials, precarious employment and pay disparity compared to Canadian born citizens (Statistics Canada, 2011). As noted in chapter five, Black youth do not need Whites to protect them from their elders. Agencies that deprived me of the opportunity to recruit Black African youth reflect the kind of thinking that created residential schools, demonizing indigenous communities and eroding youth cultural foundations.

The focus group methodology also provided a chance for them to gather without being criminalized. In **chapter four**, a major complaint was that teachers always concluded they were up to no good but the research space validated their concerns and offered an avenue to support

one another and devise social action. Contrary to school and society's expectations, their gathering did not produce retaliatory or criminal ideas; they sought meaningful collaborative possibilities that would benefit themselves and others. This speaks to the fact that society's fear and paranoid shut down outlets for youth and reflects its own failings. The forum promoted structural reflections, engendered inspiration, collective visioning, action, leadership, and skills recognition. Focus groups redirect power from the researcher (Madriz, 2001), validating subjects' counter-narratives and enabling them to influence the data collection process (Pollack, 2003). In this study, the intersecting gendered raced and class oppression that African youth face was shifted from mere subtexts to the center of the narrative. Pollack (2003) suggests that this is an important feature of focus groups especially if the researcher is from the dominant group. I argue that it also tests the sincerity and ability of racialized researchers to promote contextual research. This focus group variant promoted voice and agency which are important for anti-Black racist research; it also met other sublime needs of participants.

The rich findings in **Chapter four** show the efficacy of the dialogue approach in facilitating healing, community building, and growth for youth, elders and researcher alike. In particular, the adapted focus group method is useful for research with marginalized populations as it facilitates structural analysis and allows internalized oppression to be resisted. Group solidarity counteracted regurgitation of hegemonic discourses that may be prevalent in individual interviews. Orality also enables all educational levels to participate because literacy is not required but rather critical ability to analyze shared experiences which according to Bishop, (1994) ends the shame. Dialogue enabled self-other dynamics and narrative creation that broadened individual horizons. Participants not only told their stories but deconstructed and decoded myths through a cycle of sharing, listening, learning, processing, creating, and sharing

again. All participants met the study criteria for years of residence in Waterloo region outlined in **chapter one** but different levels of exposure made for rich insights from varied encounters with systems of oppression. This speaks to the power of positive peer engagement, recognition of unique histories and youth potential that can be harnessed by removing hegemonic fetters

As noted in **chapter three**, youth, who initially denied the existence of racism in their schools, found the words to articulate their stories, rejecting “his story”. Coming together to discuss in groups and safe spaces foster a critical anti-Black racist analysis that is less possible one on one. Isolation of racialized people imposes the oppressor’s frames, especially in small communities. The critical Afrocentric model enables Blacks and others to challenge the very nature of social structures rather than simply striving to fit into or adapt to systems that were never meant to include them. The study’s Afrocentric strategies encouraged the youth to reach into their own truths to recognize issues that threaten and compromise their identity (James et. al., 2010). They validated each other, by mirroring the dismantling of shame and stigma. The youth took ownership of the research and shifted from victimhood to change catalysts, as grounding in their heritage raised confidence levels. The dialogue forum’s hopeful, celebratory African ambiance belied the gravity of the issues as the youth enjoyed the camaraderie, knowing they are not alone. A group that evolved organically from the forum applied for a grant to continue exploring African identity. They succeeded where I could not by attracting peers who are out of school and employment, showing them that this study is as much about education as it is about African identity, a testimony to the power of dialogue methods and youth empowerment. This study was conceptualized as a social action research that can help to change life outcomes for Black youth so that they are not constantly preoccupied with effects of trauma and their safety. The site of learning or of research need not be sites of re-traumatization or exploitation.

Using an Afrocentric approach was a major strength as it engendered collaboration, contributed to the fidelity of the findings and enhanced my reflectivity and ability to stay true to both my ontological and epistemological obligations

Pollack (2003) said of her experience with incarcerated Black women: “[F]eminist researchers have found focus groups to be valuable for understanding collective experiences of marginalization, developing a structural analysis of individual experiences, and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, and class. “These benefits are in contrast to individual interviews, which may lend themselves to privatized and individualistic accounts of gendered experiences and which risk reproducing colonizing relationships and discourses” (Page 461). I suggest that methodologically, research that investigates anti-Black racism needs to honour African collectivist ethos (Asante, 2000, Dei, 1995) by bringing Africans together in dialogue in order to counter and subvert whiteness and the denial that individuals often deal with in isolation. Employing an Afrocentric approach to focus groups is a key methodological contribution of this research and fundamental for anti-Black racist research which I would like to build on it in my further work.

Policy Implications

This research is timely and relevant because in December 2014, the UN General Assembly, in its Resolution 68/237, proclaimed the decade 2015 to 2024, the *International Decade for People of African Descent* (unesco.org, 2014) and there is yet to be Canadian acknowledgment. The UN slogan is “Ten years to Act” of which only seven remain. I hope this dissertation will be one of many efforts to put the spotlight on the decade and awaken Canada to mobilize recognition, justice, and development of African people. Recognition of demographic shifts in society demands hiring, curricular development; training, anti-Black racism and human

rights policies so Canadian utopia is not attained at the expense of racialized Canadians.

“Educational system does not need a tune up- it needs an overhaul. Black children have been maligned by the system, Black teachers have been maligned, Black history has been maligned, Africa has been maligned” (Dei, as cited in Conyers Jr. Ed., 2003, p. 48). Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne’s (2009) words remain germane to the consideration of policy reforms.

If we are to succeed, we must draw on our experience and on research that tells us that student achievement will improve when barriers to inclusion are identified and removed and when all students are respected and see themselves reflected in their learning and their environment (Wynne, 2009).

Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman (2011, P. 113) decries “reactive remediation efforts,” demonstrating that strategic investment in preventing disparities yields returns (crime prevention, and a better, more skilled and stable workforce)”. Addressing long-term inequalities in health and education requires providing academic guidance and meaningful individualized post-secondary education strategies mapped out to stem the tide of streaming youth away from academic programs which confine them to inferior adult outcomes and lifelong repercussions.

This study calls for policy changes as well as inter-agency preventative and family strengthening collaborations between schools, police services, our universities and research centers, child welfare and all youth serving agencies. Qualitative studies illuminate patterns and trends that taken together enable new policies to be formulated to address social problems. This study recognizes the economic value of immigrants from previously undesirable countries for a country without a natural replacement population. Liberalization of immigration policy must be seen as a first step, not an end in itself. Steps must be taken to ensure immigrants become

contributory citizens through schooling for inclusion, empowerment and liberation that enables visible of minorities and racialized persons to actualize their human rights and potential, thereby enhancing the nation state because “*we know that a strong, publicly funded education system is the foundation of our ... future prosperity*” (Ontario Equity and Inclusion Education Strategy 2009, p.2).

Currently, school policies that purportedly address racism hang over the heads of the youth as scepters to judge, blame and punish. The youth are wary of reporting their experiences because the school’s reactions reinforce their disenfranchisement. Schools conclude that “there is no racism in our schools” only because those who are impacted have been policed into self-censorship. Thus, policing is not physical, it is accomplished through policies that appear innocuous but invalidate the youth realities. They are policed by policies at school as much as they are by guns and street patrols. The “friendly” policing at school disarms the youth, is harder to recognize, name, and address because it superimposes hegemony as normal, universal and human. The study’s findings show Black youth are touched by racism physically, emotionally, socially and mentally, but are silenced for fear of reprisal from policies that are Eurocentric. Canada has a multiculturalism policy but its Anglo Saxon elements remain sacred. Schools have diversity policies but not a diverse workforce to interpret and implement the policies. I have a dream that Black and other racialized youth will find meaningful supports in the public school system. Their needs should not only be met by fund-starved informal ethnocultural initiatives confined to the peripheries because the school system is funded by citizen tax dollars.

Recommendations

The dream may be grand but in what remains of this “Ten years to Act” launched by the United Nations General Assembly, contextualized research in our communities and sincere

commitment to implement recommendations emanating from such studies would be steps in the right direction of understanding current realities, disrupting hegemony and working towards bringing the dream to fruition. An evaluation at the end of the decade would be imperative so that gains can be acknowledged, built upon, re-envisioned and implemented. Issues raised by various commissions in the past must be revisited to determine if the status quo persists or there has been progress and barriers to their implementation must be studied. The recommendations articulated below represent realistic local contextualized actions that can ignite the dream

Recommendation one: Reflect diversity in Staffing.

Diversity in hiring is not only a moral and human rights issue; it makes business sense (Herring, 2009, Science Daily). Recognizing that all humans have a bias, staff hiring processes must include checks and balances that mitigate unconscious bias, thus ensuring stated intentions become reality. A policy on increasing the number of Black teachers is needed. The scholarship supports the view of the youth that they would greatly benefit from having teachers who look like them (Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 2007). When schools do not reflect demographics of the society they serve, some groups remain un-served or underserved. A staff diversification policy is needed. Finally, an annual survey of staff diversity that measures hiring with targets set for hiring specific groups is required to demonstrate sincerity and commitment to the policy. The community, students, alumni, parents, and members of a school's catchment area should have input into hiring criteria and strategies to attract diverse teacher and ensure a work environment that accepts cultural diversity, offers pay equity, respect, and safety for all.

Recommendation two: Develop Organizational Commitment to Anti-Black Racism

Leadership at the school board level should articulate a well-informed definition of racism, what it looks like and how to recognize, prevent and or address it. Anti-racist education cannot be self –adulatory but must be informed by the perspective of the racialized. African elders can provide training on African history, colonialism, how to be an accomplice and other frameworks for eliminating discrimination. The community must be involved in developing, implementing and evaluating the policy to ensure it is wholistic and feasible. Staff evaluation should reflect the board and the school’s commitment to anti-Black racism. Teachers, administrators, secretaries and assistants’ response to racism reports should be rewarded based on a commitment to the strategy and actions taken to pursue social justice.

Recommendation Three: Schools must collect race data:

The ministry of education has directed all boards to commence collection of race-based data. The youth in this study concluded that schools recruit teachers to serve white students only maybe because there is ignorance of current demographic realities. Timelines for addressing this mismatch must be articulated and school boards must track the race, colour, and ethnic group of students in order to ensure their outcomes can be evaluated and examined to inform better ability to serve their best interests.

Recommendation Four: Urban diversity exposure as social work and teacher education

Changing demographics require helping these professionals to engage diversity as well as global and local realities. At the core of equity is the realization that recognizing differences is not enough and providing differential contextualized responses for specific groups is not unfair. Ensuring specific needs and basic human rights of all groups are met is only a small contribution to re-righting (Absalon, 2010) historical and contemporary injustice and inequity which social workers must interrogate practically before they commence work with vulnerable groups.

Diversity should not be a course students take to meet graduation requirements or faculties teach to meet accreditation standards, it must be diffused throughout all courses and students must move out of their comfort zones. If social work training defines excellence as experiential, high impact learning opportunities that enable social workers to exemplify transformative education and engage with society's most pressing issues will be prioritized in funding decisions.

Recommendation Five: Regular In-Service Cultural Training.

Urban diversity exposure must be followed up by regular cultural training because diversity is not a static issue and training must respond to changes in the school and society. Supports, rewards, and incentives must be provided to enable teachers to attend in-service training and be creative in their diversity engagement. Teachers and staff will take a cue from administrators' attitude to resource allocation for training as well as opportunity to implement cultural sensitivity practice after attending the training

Recommendation Six: Inventory of Parent skills and Knowledge

Staff cannot appropriate Afrocentric knowledge but must be willing to learn humbly. Afrocentric object lessons and activities can be integrated by teachers, social workers, and other professionals into mainstream schooling and health interventions. An appreciative inquiry model will enable schools to engage the skills and cultural capital present in the school. Many Black parents have rich personal and professional experiences to share with students and seeing them as assets will expose the rich diversity and abundant resources in the school community. Also, all board and school policy should be examined for language that disenfranchises members of the school body. Rather than merely decrying racism, community members should be involved in reviewing and suggesting more inviting policy documents based on lived experiences

Recommendation Seven: Assign social workers to fewer schools

Assigning social workers to specific schools may be costly but not as much as mental health, criminal justice and incarceration costs that are borne by taxpayers. Schools must be educated on the distinct roles social workers play in relationship building and healthy identity formation which take time to achieve and is definitely separate from attendance monitoring. Guidance counsellors, nurses and teacher counsellors perform several roles in schools but social workers perform a distinct role in the area of mental health and help other professionals expand their horizon by interrogating social determinants of health. This is important as the school years span several developmental phases for children. Social work support would ensure healthy emotional, social, and mental adjustment for all students through various life stages proactively. Additionally, specific groups of youth such as newcomers who have gone through the trauma of immigration or youth experience racism require social work support to ensure their successful integration, not assimilation or reformation.

Recommendation Eight: Universities must play a Welcoming role

Given concerns about dwindling enrolment, particularly at the tertiary level, Waterloo region which hosts three post-secondary institutions stands to benefit from being a more welcoming community. York University has taken steps to foster a welcoming environment and promote postsecondary education access by not just studying and objectifying its neighboring Jane and Finch community but inviting, engaging and embracing them through its New Opportunities for Innovative Student Engagement (NOISE, 2014). The research informed engagement model promotes multi-directional learning among Jane and Finch youth, social work students, and alumni to enhance the academic success of both populations (NOISE, 2016). Waterloo region needs to take proactive action to facilitate placement and retention of Black African youth

Recommendation Nine: Give equal attention to all genders

Eurocentric discourses equate Blackness with Black masculinity and criminality, ignoring Black females. Girls respond to social exclusion differently than boys and, require relational solutions that address their unique concerns. The ontology of forgetting toward discursive violence perpetrated by the school system means children learn to put up with the violence of racism at school and may be more prone to becoming victims of the workplace and domestic violence. The current emphasis on gendered violence is great but does not account for where youth learn to perpetrate or tolerate it. The Ontario Youth Action Plan emphasizes collaborative approaches that build mental capital and provide opportunities to experience social justice, control, cultural validation, identity, and voice. Such interventions boost hope, mental health, and resilience, mitigate effects of racism and contribute to Black girls' ability to build healthy families and vibrant societies in contrast to deficit-based programs. Specific proactive emphasis on the Black girl child will counter ideas of Black girls as model Blacks which is a subterfuge; all need to be accepted as humans with foibles, flaws, strengths, and feelings.

Recommendation Ten: Educate the Public about Canada's need of Immigrants

No nation can thrive on low birth rate, few workers, and an aging population. Canada's low birth rate is compounded by declining growth in immigration from European sources. The nation is compelled to look to non- European sources. There is need to inform the populace through massive public education. Census projections show that the number of visible minority immigrants is expected to increase from about 4,000,000 in 2011 to between 6,313,000 and 8,530,000 (Statistics Canada, 2016). The Black population remains the third largest visible

minority group in Canada because they are needed and schools, employers, policymakers and the general citizenry must appreciate this as a community safety imperative.

This study recommends hiring Black teachers, assigning social workers to fewer schools to promote relationship building, urban diversity and ongoing cultural sensitivity training, as well as involving parents and community in policy drafting, hiring, training, and teaching in schools. It is hoped that board wide commitment to anti- Black racism, and a system that tracks, rewards, and funds such commitment would make the region truly inclusive. This study has limitations, some of which are highlighted below and they all point to the need for future larger-scale studies.

Limitations of the Study

To enable readers to contextualize this study and provide a backdrop for further research, I highlight few limitations of the study below.

There were eleven females and six males in the study. Many males declined to participate or failed to attend because the study was about school experiences. Some of these males were not currently in school and did not consider the study to be relevant to them. Siblings who attended explained that their brothers either felt they had nothing to contribute or had a lot to say but felt too stigmatized to attend. In some cases, participants provided insights into their brother's thoughts, frustrations and pain ensuring their stories are included from the sibling's perspective

As teachers in schools are predominantly female and the school climate and teaching styles reflect the female preponderance, this may have contributed to the higher participation of females over males. However the males who attended represented male voices eloquently as males spoke extensively on specific topics that related to male experiences and realities. There is also a need for research on the views, job and satisfaction of the few Black teachers in the region

The study was designed to include Black African youth of all levels of engagement and achievement including those who have exited the school system, those currently in school and those who are working but most of the participants are currently in school. My status as a parent may have caused reticence among some youth leading to those currently in school to be over-represented in the study. Beliefs that parents simply care about education as a tool of social advancement may have contributed to some youth believing their views may not be welcome.

In relation to this, Ungar and Teram, (2005) noted that society dichotomizes who is high achieving and who is not and this tends to fragment vulnerable communities. It is not unlikely that my status as a Black doctoral student might have made some youth and parents believe that the study is about success and those defined as successes in hegemonic discourse. They might have concluded that they were not entitled to speak on matters relating to school success or that even if they did, their views would not be validated. Discourses of victim blaming and stereotypes often produce withdrawal, internalized oppression and defiance (Mullaly, 2010).

Also, many of the youth were recruited through the African association's networks and may have been familiar with Afrocentric discourses which may explain their comfort with African elders. Other studies may yield similar or varied results.

The sample was limited to Black African youth who self-identified as African which could have skewed the findings in terms of positive regard for their African heritage or identity.

The use of the dialogic forum method meant that we had to find a day and time that worked for most participants and resulted in some interested youth not being able to attend the forum due to work schedules over which they had no control

All of these limitations point to a need for bigger large-scale studies on the Black African experience in Waterloo region. Such studies would accommodate varied dates and community

researchers from different spheres such as outreach workers trained to conduct research. The use of mixed methods may be pursued as quantitative tools can provide wider reach and supplement the qualitative design which provided rich in-depth qualitative data. The amount of work done in teasing out the mound of data in this study, in order to select what to include in this dissertation attests to the richness and effectiveness of the qualitative Afrocentric study for eliciting in-depth narratives that enabled the participants to express the truths as they experienced it.

Future Research Directions

Black Experience in Waterloo region

There is definitely a need to build on this modest dissertation study on Black African youth in Waterloo region as it answered some questions but raised new areas of inquiry for exploration and elucidation. The Black Experience project in Toronto has sought to shed light on the experiences and lived realities of Blacks of all ages and walks of life in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area. Such a large study across all facets of the Black population and which examines health, employment, family, policing, justice, access to social services, opportunities and threats, as well as human rights is needed in Waterloo region to build upon this study of Black youth schooling experiences.

Based on the findings in this study, that almost all Black youth in the region have never had a Black teacher, I would like to understand the experiences of the few Black teachers in Waterloo region to assess their job satisfaction, how they understand their role and respond to the pressure to be mentors, activists and mental/emotional supports to their Black students. It will enable an understanding of how they navigate the dynamics of their multiple roles in the school

system and assessment of the recognition and or supports available to them and to other Black teachers who may be recruited in response to advocacy efforts by the Black African community

This dissertation sparked my interest in examining access to health and wellness among Black African youth with a view to addressing the barriers and exploring the use of Afrocentric therapies and approaches. Understanding the interactions between mental health, wellness and race-informed issues are important to enable effective differential cultural responses.

I will continue my work among Black youth through the mechanism of my social innovation laboratory - Community Academic Reciprocal Engagement (CARE) which is informed by NOISE and the Walls to Bridges programs run by my research advisors (Anucha; Pollack). My laboratory uses the transformative power of arts as a universal language to interrogate tough topics. It has so far afforded social work students opportunity to develop self-awareness and active listening skills through dialogues, dance, drumming, African history, culture, and joint creation of art for social change in response to evocative activities. It has great promise for use in further intergroup dialogue within the schools to demystify blackness to peers, teachers, staff, parents, and administrators to realize the impact of experiential learning on varied stakeholder groups involved with Black African students.

In addition to the pupils and students in the elementary and secondary schools, I am interested in understanding the experiences of Black African international students in Canadian universities. The study will study colleges and university's approaches to becoming more welcoming and safe for students of culturally diverse backgrounds in light of heightened international student recruitment by Canadian post secondary institutions.

Understanding the Black experience in Canada requires studying different Black populations including parents of school age youth and Black grandparents aging out of place in

Canada to center their experiences, health, identity, hopes and aspirations as well as their sites of resistance and meaning-making. This will make a huge contribution to social work knowledge and ability to engage what continues to be a growing and significant proportion of the Canadian population. In addition to these ongoing projects, my long-term research will focus on:

- Child welfare experiences of Black families and immigrants, including Black foster parents, Black youth aging out of care, kinship family systems, race of child welfare worker and child outcomes and experiences of Black child welfare workers
- Family dynamics e.g. meaning making around “bail or blame” family decisions and interactions with Black young males who may be out of school, in a gang or incarcerated.
- Exploring the perspectives of Black parents as well as White parents and grandparents on their experiences of raising Black children in small Canadian communities.
- How does the quest for a better life which motivates most immigrant parents put pressure on Black youth and impact their understanding of their parents’ immigration sacrifices?
- I am interested in what motivates non-Black people to come alongside and work with Blacks. How do Whites interrogate whiteness and what influences allies and accomplices?
- I have a strong interest in the scholarship of teaching and learning and exploring what constitutes teaching excellence across disciplines. I also desire to work with others to build capacity in newly established African schools of social work to develop contextualized code of ethics and accreditation standards in Sub-Saharan African countries.
- Finally, examining the relationship between faith, race and social justice movements continues to engage my interest, particularly in light of current world events.

Chapter 8: Final Remarks to the Community - From Anti-Racism to Pro-African

“It begins with breaking the silence, ending the shame, and sharing our concerns and feelings. Story-telling leads to analysis where we figure out together what is happening to us and why, and who benefits. Analysis leads to strategy when we decide what to do about it. Strategy leads to action, together; to change the injustices we suffer. Action leads to another round: reflection, analysis, strategy, action. This is the process of liberation.” (Bishop 1994, p.104)

Africans need a liberatory strategy that is offensive, rather than defensive and deconstructive. Active pro-African, stance embraces proactive measures and can avoid the twin dangers of a) paralysis that a reactive focus on the “anti” in anti-racism produces, and b) mental assent without commitment to decolonizing ourselves as Africans who value our own knowing. I situated my examination of hegemonic ideas at the intersection of critical race and Afrocentric theories, using the integrative critical Afrocentric theory model I developed. It is not surprising that Ladson-Billings (1995) found teachers who claimed to be colour blind had the least ability to promote inclusive classrooms. Africans who feel beholden to whiteness cannot help Black children meaning making as they are not served by getting lost in white normativity. We cannot afford not to recognize that our struggles as Africans are not out there but felt and embodied by all of us (Kumsa et. al., 2014). To be really free, the African has to be more African, not White. To embrace our Africaness is not polarizing, it is a strategy of wholeness and wellness. Asante (2000) declared “we must aspire to more than shutting down, we must create, manufacture and invent” P.25. We have to supplant colonialist ideas that our freedom comes from outside our being African with time tested systems of governance, child care, philosophies, and restorative justice systems that served us well (Shizha, 2010) as no amount of un-Africanness will ever be good enough. As bell hooks notes, “for many Black people, integration has required that they give their hearts to whiteness – and they have returned home broken-hearted” (2003, p. 10).

The African Canadian association of Waterloo region and area (ACAWRA) which serves the region's African community was founded in 2000 when some Africans noticed Black youth and children lacked of programs to address language, culture and issues of oppression that were causing Black youth to fall behind their peers. They started an after-school homework program and began to drive, tutor, and support pupils who were underserved by the schools.

Satchel (2012), who studied Somali youth the ACAWRA program and another site in Minneapolis, USA, noted that the larger Minneapolis community supported Somali intellectuals in running their youth program while ACAWRA was left to deal with the influx of Somalis even though it was informal, entirely volunteer-run and unfunded. Similarly, the Coalition for the Success of African-Caribbean-Canadian youth founded by a retired Caribbean Black principal to address barriers faced by youth in partnership with the African association and Caribbean groups was suspended in 2016 due to lack of funding. This trend is not limited to Waterloo region. In Toronto a Substance Abuse Program for African Canadian and Caribbean Youth SAPACCY that was part of the Center for Mental Health and Addiction (CMHA) had its staff cut in order to mainstream it, thus losing its unique cultural relevance and appeal (The star.com, May 4, 2017). My Community Academic Reciprocal Engagement (CARE) project aims to mitigate some of the funding and apathy issues by developing University community partnerships. The African community must embrace research as a tool for knowledge mobilization and translation with a view to shaping policies and practices immediate and future.

Neoliberal reproductions ensure concerns about the overrepresentation of Black youth in jail, gangs, and child welfare do not translate to targeted resources and services that promote wholeness. The African Canadian Association program, being volunteer- supported and lacking government funding, relied on grant writing, aligning with the priorities of funders who fund one

time projects or projects that serve all people, negating the needs of specific groups. SAPACCY was allowed to wither even though mental health problems among Black youth in the GTA are escalating because CMHA in trying to “break down silos” failed to recognize that targeting unique problems is not exclusion, it is equity and justice. The Walrus, (Robyn Maynard, 17th November, 2017) report of a six-year-old unarmed Black girl handcuffed by armed police at school eloquently shows the need for community solidarity to stem the tide of dehumanization.

Berry’s (1997) model looks at the relationship between newcomers and host communities as taking one of four forms i.e., assimilation, separation, marginalization, or integration. Berry’s analysis makes the newcomer responsible for their mode of acculturation. Newcomers and the racialized do not want silos, they want integration, but the host community pursues assimilation. Currently what we have is not integration as differences are judged using nationalism and patriotism (Ahmed, 2000, Mackey, 2002) to avoid interrogating whiteness. To be seen as the stranger and prejudged is to bring all the weight of history to bear upon the Black person while maintaining ahistorical discourses (Ahmed 2000). Blacks fought long and hard to end segregation and must not allow ourselves to be coerced into assimilation by abandoning the goal of integration in a show of patriotism to a system that sees six-year-old Black girls as threatening and unworthy. As African origin people in this decade, we must come to terms with and start from the incongruence in Canadian life for minorities (Bannerji, 1996).

We must begin to unapologetically demand support and funding for our ethnocultural activities that target specific needs and ultimately promote social cohesion. Funding for capacity building, organizational governance training, offerings of culturally relevant programs, youth workers, and social workers, as well as development of curricular, pedagogical and intervention tools are imperative. The need for a community center has been well articulated in evaluation

assessments of the ACAWRA homework program. This study also showed that Black African youth need safe spaces to meet to break the isolation and be validated. Culture-specific programs start from the known to the unknown, using tested tools that validate heritage and identity to equip youth to face the challenges in the larger society.

The lack of such supports was evident as many parents sought my advise during the participant recruitment phase of this research even if their ward declined participation or was otherwise ineligible. There were few places to refer families to besides the ACAWRA which is wholly volunteer-run and does not employ any social workers or other helping professionals. To ACAWRA's credit, it has managed to keep the homework program running for 20 years through community efforts. Mental health and well-being programs are unsustainable without staff, space, and funds that can help the Black community resist amputation (Fanon, 1970). Programs such as African Community wellness initiative (ACWI), Community Academic Reciprocal Engagement (CARE), and the coalition for the success of Black African and Carribean youth are examples of efforts by African professionals to meet the needs of the youth. These initiatives promote culturally relevant interventions to foster educational aspirations among Black youth.

A report presented at the annual conference of the Ontario Alliance of Black Educators found that Black students constitute about half of all students suspended in the Toronto District School Board. In addition, the practice of streaming Black youth towards programs below their ability was denounced. Once youth are streamed into non academic programs, it limits their ability to get into college or university, thus decisions made in grade nine to categorize students into programs mainly based on their race were found to impact their life options and adult trajectories (Muriel Draaisma, CBC News April 24, 2017). It is important for Black communities to decry these unacceptable trends. All communities must heed the call to review what is

happening to Black youth in our respective school boards in order to understand what we are up against. Community involvement is imperative in school boards like WRDSB where there are few Black teachers. It is hardly surprising that it was the association of Black educators who focused attention on these issues. We cannot as a community assume the Ministry's recent directive that school boards must start collecting race data and increase staffing diversity will be heeded. In this regards, Barrack Obama's oft quoted comment is germane - *"change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time, we are the ones we've been waiting for; we are the change that we seek"* (New York Times, February 5, 2008).

The Community Academic Reciprocal Engagement (CARE) project, I started was primarily in recognition of the need for partnership between educators and the community. As the name suggests, CARE is a vehicle for promoting collaboration between both sectors but in a reciprocal manner that honours and validates plural epistemology, culture, theories and methods. CARE is designed to be a research outfit that collaborates with other agencies and organizations serving Black African and Caribbean people. It will focus not just on change but the nature of change, organize social action and draw support for the cause of Black African and Caribbean people from research funding organizations interested in community research and connections. To do this, services will be analyzed to determine the fit between manifest outcomes and intended goals, thereby unearthing inequities in policy and practise.

This dissertation is only a start, larger scale studies will collect evidence that will be used to engage the public, establish accountability and evaluate outcomes for the Black community. Previous research enabled service users to provide input into the review of curriculum for Wilfrid Laurier University School of social work (Watters, Cait & Oba, 2016). Black girls in the

CARE social innovation laboratory also told their stories to social work students and together, they began developing a community tool kit for engaging racialized youth.

This UN decade of action for Africans is time to act by informing ourselves and advocating appropriately. There is a dearth of studies on youth in Waterloo region and every contribution counts towards collective transgression, reclaiming our rights as equal partners. Youth and elders, parents and children, those viewed as successes or not, researchers, academics, and practitioners, male and female must engage in political resistance. Our African origin and ethos dictate working together to resist injustice. Like Dr. King Jr., I too have a dream, that someday classrooms will be safe and the curriculum, staff, teachers, and administrators will inspire Black youth to aspire without limits. I dream of teachers and social workers who have the best interest of Black youth at heart enabling them to focus on learning without fear. I dream that schooling will no longer be trauma and the excitement of kindergarten will be nurtured by the school so that Black pupils will realize their potential and not be marginalized because of the colour of their skin. For now, we lean on the shoulders of giants who fought for our right to be on the inside and fight to be heard and validated, buoyed up by Pan-Africanism.

I am your colleague, your peer, your student, your teacher, your neighbor. You see me every day. You tell me you don't see a Black woman; you just see a woman. I don't want to ruin the party or puncture anyone's innocence. It's really hard to be a killjoy (Ahmed, 2009) but it's much harder not to feel true.... I sweat and groan inwardly until I speak. Then I become marked. But to not speak is to die daily, to also be amputated and left by the wayside, dis-abled and bleeding (Kumsa et.al.p.24).

Appendix A

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Not in our Backyard: School Experiences of Black African youth in Waterloo Region, Principal investigator: Olufunke (Funke) Oba and Shoshana Pollack (advisor)

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to understand the school experiences of Black African youth in Waterloo Region. The researcher, Funke Oba is a Black African doctoral candidate in the faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University

INFORMATION

The research will take the form of a community dialogue using story telling. The youth will share stories of their school experiences with community elders in the first 90 minutes of the community dialogue.

In the second half, elders and youth will participate in an Afrocentric activity through stories or proverbs. Both the youth and the elders will deliberate on the meaning of the youth stories and the Afrocentric elements of leaning. The total duration of the forum is 3 hours.

Interested participants will also participate in in-depth story telling interviews to supplement the insights gained from the group discussion

The forum and individual sessions will be audio recorded with consent from participants, and supplemented by notes recorded on a laptop by the researcher during the sessions

There shall be no use of deception in this study.

RISKS

The researcher does not foresee any risks or discomforts with procedures to be used in the study that are outside the daily experiences of the research participants. However, resources and referrals will be provided should anyone be triggered by exploring issues they may have learned to ignore or silence.

BENEFITS

Understanding the context, prevalence and forms of racism, marginalization or disenfranchisement in the lives of Black African youth will inform policy and practice initiatives in the area of curriculum, pedagogy, engagement and inclusion in schools

Youth voices will be heard, acknowledged and made visible through this research

Educators, social workers, policy makers and the community will be educated and sensitized

Documenting the steps and processes of this emergent research approach will inform future culturally validating research

The intergenerational forum can promote youth appreciation of cultural capital; youth agency, and healing of ruptures in the community by enhancing awareness of elders about the experiences youth face.

The study makes an important contribution to the body of knowledge on Black African youth in Waterloo Region and other small communities locally and globally.

Dissemination of the study findings through other dialogues with peers, and the larger society will promote empathy, illuminate obfuscated experiences and counteract the disavowal of Black African youth experiences or the experiences of other Black and marginalized populations

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be protected through ensuring no identifying information is reported. Only signatures will be collected on consent forms which will be stored in a locked cabinet by the researcher or her supervisor Dr. Shoshana Pollack and destroyed within three years. Given the number of participants in the community individual quotes will not be identifiable and pseudonyms will be used for the individual in-depth interview data to ensure anonymity of participant is maintained. Names will not be used in the report, dissertation or publications. Participants will be given a chance to vet any quotes selected for use. You will be able to suggest paraphrase or deletions of unique statements that may make them identifiable if quote is used in its original format memo#5

COMPENSATION

Participants will receive \$10 for participating in each of the community dialogue and the in-depth interview. Participants may withdraw at any time during the research without any penalty but will receive \$10 for partial participation. Bus tickets and refreshments will also be provided to participants.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures,(or experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study you may contact Funke Oba, at obax1230@mylaurier.ca. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this

form, or your rights as a research participant have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710 x4994 or rbasso@wlu.ca

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study, every attempt will be made to remove your data from the study, and have it. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose. Please note that if you do participate in the dialogue forum before withdrawing, it is not possible to delete the data because of the group conversational nature of the dialogue forum.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

Results of the research will be disseminated through the researcher's doctoral dissertation and publications in reputable academic peer reviewed journals. A community friendly "myth or fact" poster will be distributed and participants will have an opportunity to receive an electronic copy of either a summary or the full dissertation, approximately in the winter of 2017.

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

YOU ARE INVITED...

To
Participate in a Research Dialogue

Not in Our Backyard : Experiences of Black Students in Waterloo Region

We Invite African Black Youth Aged 16 -24 Years
Come, share and discuss your experience with a Black Researcher
At

Youth Community Dialogue Forum



The Forum Will Support Engagement of Black Youth in Waterloo Region

Your Participation Can Make a Difference in in Schooling Policy and Practice for you and others !!

Each participant will receive \$10

Snacks and refreshment will be provided

Please Contact

Funke Oba

Email: obax1230@wlu.ca

LAURIER
Inspiring Lives.



Appendix C: Prompts for life story Interviews

Black Identity

1. How do you identify yourself in terms of your race?
2. In what country were you born?
3. Have you lived in any other cities, provinces in Canada?
4. Do you have siblings, if so how many brothers/sisters do you have?

Experiences of Blackness at school

5. What is your experience of being Black African in Waterloo region? In Canada?
6. For those who have lived elsewhere, are there differences between your experiences in Waterloo and elsewhere?
7. How would you describe your sense of belonging to your school community?
8. What and or who makes or made you feel welcome / unwelcome in the school?
9. What are your thoughts on why it happens?
10. Do people at school still believe in stereotypes about Black people, has any been applied to you
11. Have you experienced any name calling, slurs, physical, verbal, emotional abuse, wrongful accusation or bullying, unfair treatment, harsh punishment at school

Education/Work

12. How many years of elementary and high school education have you completed?
13. Are you currently working, attending school, college, skilled Trades program or university?
14. If applicable, what are the reasons you did not finish high school? What would have helped?

Curriculum

15. How much do you learn at school about Black history, African heroes, culture, symbols etc?
16. How many Black teachers taught you and why does having Black teachers in schools matter?
17. How open is the school to you, introducing cultural knowledge or parents as resource persons?

Supports

18. How helpful are/ were your teachers in helping you cope with difficult times at school?
19. How have social workers helped you integrate, feel welcome and accepted at school

20. Who/what helps you deal with experiences of alienation, marginalization or discrimination
21. Have you ever experienced any difficulties getting help from a teacher, administrator or school staff when you needed it? If so, what types of difficulties did you experience?
22. Does the school address social needs, bullying, name calling, racial slurs, stereotypes well

Impacts

23. How satisfied are you with your school life?
24. Have you ever missed school because you felt unsafe, dissatisfied with school?
25. Have your health, social life, family, friendships etc been affected by these experiences?
26. What has been the impact on your learning, future plans and educational aspirations?

Appendix D: Dialogue Forum guide

1. How do you identify yourself in terms of your race?
2. Can you comment on how the experiences of Black Africans differ from White Africans and or from the non- Black Canadians?
3. In your opinion what are the main challenges faced by Black African youth in Canada?
4. Who supports you when you face any experience in your school related to your race?
5. How are the experiences of Black boys similar or different from those of girls at school? If there are differences why?
- 6.
7. Can you comment on the sense of belonging among Black African youth in the school system? What contributes and what is a barrier?
- 8.
9. Do you know of any Black African youth leaving the school system? Why do you think this is happening?
- 10.
11. What can be done to make the school system more inclusive for Black African youth?
12. How helpful are parents, teachers, and social workers, others in the school community?
13. What are some things or people that help Black youth cope at school?
14. What are some barriers, or things that make it tough for them?
15. Why do you think are the reasons for such life experiences?
16. What are the emotional, psychological, and academic needs of Black African youth
17. What are your thoughts about relationship (if any) between what Black youth face at school and the way the society views Black people?

Appendix E: Intergenerational Dialogue /Debrief Guide

1. What do you wish elders/ parents knew about your experiences at school?
2. How can your families help? What/ who else helps?
3. What do you think Black youth need from teachers and other adults?
4. Do you have people in your life who understand what you are going through at school?
5. How connected are you to the African Canadian Association, Caribbean community, your ethnic group, African students association and or other cultural groups? Why are they important?
6. How helpful did you find this dialogue forum? Any surprises?
7. Final comments

Thank you for your participation, you will receive a copy of the report shortly and those who indicated interest will be contacted for community research presentations.

Yours in the glory and restoration of mother Africa

Appendix F: Demographic Information of Participants

AGE	
16 -19	10
20 – 24	7
Total	17

GENDER	
Male	6
Female	11
Other	0
Total	17

RACE/ETHNICITY	
Black African	15
Black Caribbean (African origin)	1
Bi-Racial (African/Caucasian)	1
Total	17

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED	
Completed High School	8
Did not Complete High School	2
Currently in High School	6
Some college/University courses	2
Completed College/University	2
Total	20

Total exceeds 17 as there is an overlap because some are both working and in school

SCHOOLING/EMPLOYMENT STATUS	
In School	13
Employed	2
Not in School/Not Employed	0
Employed and in School	6
Total	21

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End notes

The names "Oba, O". and or "Oba, F". represent the same person. They represent the full official first name "Olufunke" or the shortened version "Funke". The author wishes to use the official name - Olufunke rather than the shortened version - Funke which appears in earlier works.